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MAGAZINE**

*Contemporary Art
From Turkey*

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Julius Bär

Ten years ago, Pluto the planet became Pluto the dwarf planet. In 2016, Art Dubai celebrates its tenth edition.

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SİNE ERGÜN
 Founder/Director of maumau
 photo: Erhan Arık





arthere team, from left:
OMAR BERAKDAR, ÖYKÜ D
in front of arthere
Istanbul, 2015
courtesy of arthere

MAUMAU
SİNE ERGÜN
FOUNDER

Founded by writer and artist Sine Ergün in 2012, the main idea of maumau art residency is to provide the residents with an artistic environment in which to work on their own projects. The programme invites curators, art-critics and writers alongside visual artists, which allows residents to work with individuals from different artistic domains. Located in the Çukurcuma district of Beyoğlu, maumau art residency is designed to accommodate and provide production space for several artists at the same time.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and why you decided to found maumau? How has the project developed since its beginnings?

In 2011-2012 I visited many art residencies abroad to focus on my own artistic practice. When I came back to Istanbul, I had the clear idea in my mind to start an art residency in Istanbul. It is my belief that art residencies are essential tools for artists so they can create in a different environment. Since 2012, maumau has transformed in many ways. We focused on creating the most beneficial experience for artists, in terms of networking, time schedule and accommodation. Now in our fourth year, we can happily say that maumau today is not only an art residency but also a big, international family.

What kind of artists does maumau host, and what can they expect from your residency? Do you stay in touch with previous residents after they leave?

We have three programmes: artist-in-residence, writer-in-residence and self-directed-residency. For all of them, we offer accommodation, shared working space, use of common kitchen, shared bathroom, wireless internet, presentations among the residents about their art practices, and support, advice and help for a potential participation in local events, workshops or exhibitions. For the artist-in-residence programme, we also have a final show at the end.

We keep in close contact with our previous residents. We are always in touch with them about their current or upcoming projects. Also, we keep on collaborating with them for any possible projects and shows at maumau.

Can you tell us about maumau's current projects and collaborations?

This year, we were granted the Tandem Turkey fund. Tandem is an exchange programme that assists cultural organisations in building long-term, international working relationships. We will also work on our IdentityLab project with our partner Verkstad Konsthall from Sweden, traveling around Turkey and Sweden to research identity, heritage and issues of belonging with four Swedish and Turkish artists. These projects enable future collaborations

and create visibility in the international art scene. Besides that, we run the AIR-directors-exchange programme, which aims to create an atmosphere for artist-in-residence directors to both work on their own artistic/cultural projects as well as gain experience and exchange knowledge of AIR programmes in different countries. Our previous partners are: CeRRCa in Llorenç del Penedes, Spain and Va - Independent Space for Contemporary Art in Esfahan, Iran.

Besides the art residency, we also host shows by Turkish artists. In line with this idea, we just hosted a group show titled *We look at ourselves from there*. Participating artists are: Tuba Merdeşe, Aysel Alver, Hüseyin Arıcı, Rezzak İlge, Damla Sarı, Ali Şentürk, Ayşenur İpek, Aslı Aslan and Sultan Burcu Demir. In early 2016 we're having a solo show by Ece Kalabak titled *Mathematician*. Also, we will have two artistic research tours in Turkey and Sweden in 2016, thanks to Tandem Turkey.

What advice could you offer to future resident artists to maximise the benefits of their residency and how to fund their stay?

It entirely depends on their projects and their projects' needs. Sometimes residents only come to make their own research or write their book. But sometimes they come to learn more about the local art scene and mingle with the public. In that case, we take them with us to art show openings or other events so that they can meet with more people and have a dialogue about the current political and social situation in Turkey. We also suggest that our writers have a reading event and our self-directed residents have an open-studio day at the end of their stay with us so that they can share and learn from the process - we believe that progress is only possible through collaboration and dialogue.

Unfortunately, the government support for arts and culture in Turkey is very limited. After artists have been accepted to our residency, they apply for funding from their country of origin. 80% of our residents come to maumau with such a grant.

What are some unexpected problems or challenges that you've faced while running your residency, and how (if so) did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge we are facing is the inconsistent socio-political situation in Turkey. International media coverage about what is going on in Turkey is most of the time terrifying, and artists, writers and researchers question whether it is safe to come to the residency. It is important to be aware that Istanbul is as safe as anywhere in the world. We are trying to solve this problem by talking to applicants via Skype and email, assuring them that they will be safe at maumau. Our previous residents then help us to inform people abroad about what is going on in Istanbul and that no artist should be afraid of coming to this city.

You are bringing international artists into a mostly local neighbourhood. How do your neighbours react, and how is your environment changing?

Our residents enjoy being in the middle of the city but still in an area that feels more like a small neighbourhood. Gentrification is a huge problem in Turkey and we can say that the area we are located in - Cihangir - is already highly gentrified. The gentrification wave has already spread to



other areas from here. Still, much of the old neighbourhood has survived. There are many small markets, cafes and shops around, and many locals are very friendly and helpful. Of course our area keeps progressing as well, it changes every day. When we first started, it was hard to explain to the locals what we were doing at maumau, but we worked hard to develop strong relations with our neighbours. This close relationship with our community is something that we and our residents value a lot.

How would you describe the Istanbul art scene today? What recommendations do you have for international artists working in the city?

There is no doubt that the Istanbul art scene is blooming and getting bigger every day. As it is still developing, there are many opportunities. Many of our previous residents moved to Istanbul after staying at maumau for a six-week period. They rented their own studios and began to work with art galleries and institutions. We recommend our residents to attend as many events as possible to build up a network in the local art scene – you never know what opportunities this network could lead to in the future!



arthere team, from left: OMAR BERAKDAR, ÖYKÜ D in front of arthere Istanbul, 2015 courtesy of arthere

Spotlight-on: ISTANBUL ARTIST RESIDENCIES



VIEW OF AR THERE Istanbul, 2015 courtesy of arthere

ARTHERE

OMAR BERAKDAR
CO-FOUNDER

Opened in December 2014 and founded by Omar Berakdar, arthere is a gallery and artists' workspace in the Yeldeğirmeni neighbourhood of Kadıköy. Its aim is to help Syrian refugee artists get their footing in Turkey and make valuable connections to the local art scene and beyond. The space is currently managed by Omar, together with Öykü Doğan and Zolfaqar Shaarani. Berakdar is a Syrian activist, photographer and media artist who studied Media Art History at Donau University in Krems, Austria and arrived in Istanbul in 2012. He has participated in and curated several artistic events in Syria and Istanbul, such as the Damascus Visual Art Festival in 2010 in Syria and the 'Country in Focus: Syria' part of the Documentarist Film Festival in Istanbul in 2014. Berakdar is also involved in efforts to preserve Syrian photographs within the MEPPi project.

Why did you decide to start an art space in Istanbul with a focus on Syria? How has your project transformed since its inception?

What encouraged me to start this project is the mix of local and foreign people in Yeldeğirmeni and the interest in collective and collaborative art spaces. At the same time, I noticed that there was a profound need for a platform where people from Turkey could interact with their peers from Syria and other places in the world. The aim of our project is to encourage artistic exchange and to get people to learn from each other's differences. At first 'arthere' was conceived only as an art centre, but as the project unfolded, we came up with the idea of including an art cafe that works as a meeting point, a place for discussion and a comfortable environment to get to know others and start new projects. Recently we decided to start hosting artists here as well. Since our project is still in its infancy, we haven't had any actual residents yet. We have welcomed artists for short stints, which were financed by the income of the space and grants from arts organisations.

What can artists expect from their stay at the residency, and how does arthere benefit from the programme?

Artists in residence at arthere will be in constant interaction with local artists and visitors. We provide advice and support as well as a comfortable, relaxed and friendly environment so that artists can focus on their projects. They can benefit from our wide network of contacts in all areas and from the chance to meet people from very different backgrounds. Exposure to Syrian artists specifically, can provide them insight into the current situation in this part of the world. We also think that it can be inspiring to be part of a developing art scene.

The biggest benefit for us is that a residency programme will allow us to make our structure more permanent. Also, because of the nature of our project, it thrives on new encounters and exchanges. There's a lot we can learn from residents who have experience in documentation, archiving, management or even from those who have ideas for the café space.



What are some unexpected problems or challenges that you've faced so far, and how did you overcome them?

Unrealistic expectations and conflicts of interest can pose a problem in this type of project. We try to avoid these issues as best we can by defining our obligations and commitments in writing. But we have also been willing to sit down with new participants and revise or adjust them to make sure we are all on the same page and minimise any potential problems.

We believe that the only way our project will keep its spirit is by continuing to attract and add newcomers, members, guests, visitors, friends and residents. We don't always know how we're going to improve – good things happen when we meet a new talent and begin to explore a new idea. That's why we ask our new prospective residents not to hesitate to criticise, suggest developments and share some of their ideas for the space.

What is your impression of the Istanbul art scene today?

Despite concern over the political situation in Turkey, the Istanbul alternative art scene, specifically in Kadıköy and Karaköy, is developing at a quick pace. This demonstrates that artists have a lot to say but also that they're struggling to find semi-official spaces where they can express themselves and show their art. Hence the proliferation of shared artists' studios in areas like Yeldeğirmeni in Kadıköy.

You are bringing international artists into a mostly local neighbourhood. How do your neighbours react?

We're very much a part of the neighbourhood's fabric: not only do we take advantage of the existing skills and resources in the neighbourhood, such as local shops and services, but we also add a new artistic dimension to the area. The local population is quite curious about the work being done in the different artists' workshops, and they are involved in the artistic development of the neighbourhood – I often see locals at public screenings, free concerts or exhibitions. Yet we're also very conscious and respectful of our neighbours' concerns, as it's important to adapt to them. Overall, though, there have mainly been positive interactions between our artists and the local community. Once a local man who makes musical instruments happened to meet a group of Syrian Sufi musicians in our space. This led to an impromptu concert that was a fantastic experience for all those involved and the customers in our café.

Do you keep in touch with the artists once they leave? And what kind of projects have you been working on lately?

We value our network and keep in touch with members and other artists through social media and other shared contacts or projects. This has enabled us to work on projects with artists and other people involved in the art field who are not currently based in Istanbul.

Most recently we participated in *Diasporas*, an art project focusing on art, migration and diaspora in Thessaloniki as part of the 50th Dimitria Festival in 2015; A Corner in the World Festival; and the amber'15 Art and Technology Festival, both in Istanbul in November 2015. In addition we host many other projects and activities like our regular music evenings twice a month. Our upcoming projects include launching a media arts festival, a publication and intensive art-related workshops on music, photography and painting.



arthere team, from left: OMAR BERAKDAR, ÖYKÜ D in front of arthere Istanbul, 2015 courtesy of arthere

Spotlight: on: ISTANBUL ARTIST RESIDENCIES



PASAJ

ELİF BURSALI, GIORGIO CAIONE, ÖZGÜR DEMİRCİ,
ZEYNEP OKYAY, SEÇİL YAYLALI
CO-FOUNDERS! !

Founded in December 2010, PASAJ is an Istanbul-based artist initiative. It is run by artists Özgür Demirci and Seçil Yaylali, cultural operators Elif Bursalı and Zeynep Okyay and curator Giorgio Caione. Relocated three times, it hosts socially engaged and participatory art projects by local and international artists. It focuses on the value of the experience, transforming itself with the support and the creativity of artists and participators. Since 2014, PASAJ has been located in Tarlabaşı and also has a studio/office space which is used from time to time as a gallery. A closeby restaurant provides the additional project space 'lokanta'.

Why did you decide to start your residency in Istanbul, and how have you been funding the programme?

PASAJ has always been multifunctional: it is a studio, an office, and an exhibition space. We love to share what we own and cooperate in a common space. So when we found ourselves with a free room at PASAJ, it was a natural decision to offer it to artists and run a residency programme. Up until now it has been a bit impromptu, but from 2016 onwards we want the programme to operate more regularly.

For the past three years we did not charge artists. In 2014, we had a one-year grant from SAHA and were able to invite some residents. Overall it has been difficult to offer a consistent residency programme because we weren't able to secure funding. Sometimes we were so interested in an artist that we would invite them to do a project at PASAJ and pay all of their expenses from our budget. Sometimes artists would cover their travel costs and stay for free.

But from now on we will have to charge artists because we are having some financial difficulties – actually, we don't see it as charging but as sharing the costs, because otherwise PASAJ would not be able to continue hosting events. Some artists get grants from their own countries, but we may still invite artists to stay free of charge in exceptional circumstances, depending on their financial state. We are continually applying for grants to cover the costs of the residency to make this opportunity available to as many artists as possible.

What can artists expect from your residency? How do they find living in Tarlabaşı?

We offer accommodation, a network within Istanbul's contemporary art scene and an introduction to the neighbourhood. Being located in Tarlabaşı is certainly one of our strengths. It's a very special area – it's multicultural, in the process of gentrification and the people use public space more than most residents in Istanbul. We want the residents to get to know the area so that they can build up projects. In general the artists who come to do residencies at PASAJ are interested in working on socially engaged topics. So the artists want to get to know



the people that live in Tarlabası and build up a rapport with them, and we facilitate these relationships by offering to introduce them to key people in the neighbourhood and even to translate for them at times. The most successful artists have been flexible and developed their projects according to the conditions of the surrounding area.

Building a good relationship with the community in Tarlabası is essential to our mission. We are in constant communication with our neighbours – we invite them to our events and to participate in the artists' projects so that they know what's going on in the space. We try as much as we can to share our experience with the neighbourhood.

How do PASAJ and the neighbourhood benefit from the residency programme?

We have been able to build up an international network because of our residency programme. In 2016 we will begin exchange programmes with other residencies, like rum46 in Aarhus, kotti-shop in Berlin and Stadtwerkstatt in Linz. We're looking forward to sharing our experiences with these other institutions.

Our residency has also been great for Tarlabası, as the local kids get to meet new people from all over the world. We believe that knowing these foreign artists opens up the worldview of Tarlabası's youth. Because the residents are not 'tourist artists', they become part of the small, tight-knit community that lives in our neighbourhood.

What recommendations do you have for international artists working in Istanbul?

It is important to know that the Istanbul art scene is competitive, not collaborative. International artists usually come with some connections, and these connections work very well in Istanbul. Artists from abroad should try to get to know more people and visit as many independent initiatives as possible, to observe the scene and try to understand it better. Although the art world is not collaborative, the greater public is very engaged and helpful during any kind of project.

Although there are still many things lacking in the Turkish art scene – there aren't enough public or private grants, and art criticism still has to improve so that we can begin to talk about the art itself – the art scene is still going strong, with lots of exhibitions and initiatives.

What happens after the artists leave? Do you stay in touch? Are you still working on projects together?

We are in touch with almost every artist who has done a residency with us. For instance we are working on an artistic project with Local A, the Swedish duo, that will be realised in Sweden. Geocyclab, the two French artists who rode their bicycles around the world, will participate in the 4th Children and Youth Biennial that PASAJ curates.



arthere team, from left: OMAR BERAKDAR, ÖYKÜ D in front of arthere Istanbul, 2015 courtesy of arthere



Spotlight-on: ISTANBUL ARTIST RESIDENCIES

Can you tell us about both your most recent and upcoming projects, and what is on for 2016?

Jacob de Baan, the Dutch light designer, recently offered workshops to kids from the neighbourhood – during these workshops the kids designed their own lamps. We have an ongoing project by Merve Ünsal and Didem Erbaş called Collaboration on Site. During the three-week project, the artists will look for possible collaborations with the neighbours. At the end of the project they will produce a fanzine, documenting their experiences and encounters. In January Julie Upmeyer will make an installation in the 'lokanta' project space, just in the corner of our street, Ismail's place. In February, Seçil Yaylalı and Ekmel Ertan's project 61 meters of Kahya Bey Street will take place, which has already been exhibited at HKW and at Apartment Project in Berlin.

In the upcoming season we will look for grants to realise our future projects. We would also like to publish a book, provide better conditions for the artists and realise our own artistic projects.

PASAJ
ISMAIL'S SHOP
The Lokanta, Istanbul 2015
photo: Giorgio Caione





arthere team, from left:
OMAR BERAKDAR, ÖYKÜ D
in front of arthere
Istanbul, 2015
courtesy of arthere

Spotlight-on: ISTANBUL ARTIST RESIDENCIES

HALKA ART/ PROJECT

İPEK ÇANKAYA & SEZGİ ABALI ATTAL
CO-FOUNDERS

halka art/project is a non-profit, independent art initiative formed in 2011 by İpek Çankaya and Sezgi Abali Attal with the participation of their friend Ayşe Kâya. Focusing on the production, discourse and presentation of contemporary art and culture, it is not only an art residency, gallery, atelier and recreational space, but also a platform for meeting and dialogue that initiates, curates and develops art and culture projects locally and abroad. halka art/project provides links to human and technical resources and inspiration for intellectual and artistic processes, production and the sharing of knowledge through its residency programme for artists, curators, writers and theorists.

Can you tell us about your background and why you decided to start halka art/ project in Istanbul?

We slowly developed the idea of initiating a platform that would work as a meeting, production and exhibition space while studying for our MA in arts management between 2005 and 2008. Having been educated in curatorial issues, gallery management and contemporary art, we felt that we had the knowledge to successfully launch an unconventional space of our own design. The final impetus for the project was access to an unused family flat in Istanbul. That is how *halka art/project* was born. *halka* was first created as a space to host exhibitions, enable artistic exchange and facilitate community building through the arts. We added the residency programme to add an international aspect to the project and enable new encounters.

Can you tell us about the origin of the name 'halka'?

The name 'halka' was chosen because it means both 'circle' and 'for the public' in Turkish. It embodies all of our hopes for the space: that it is full and complete in itself, never-ending, always restarting. Our aim is for the project to be independent yet also working in concert with other groups to create new and larger circles. Ultimately, though, everything we do is for the public – we want to be sincere, authentic and creative.

What does a residency at halka art/ project look like?

Artists in residence must come with an idea for a project, or a research question in mind. They are given a private room in our residency building and a studio space where they can work. *halka art/gallery* is in the same neighbourhood as the residency building, and is a resource for the artists – they can hold an exhibition, organise a workshop or/and give an artist talk in the gallery at the end of their residency term. We also give them curatorial support and help to promote their projects in the community.

Also, by being in Moda, we offer residents the chance to live in a vibrant and friendly neighbourhood. While many people assume that Beyoğlu is the city's artistic centre, Moda

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and Yeldeğirmeni are transforming into creative hubs. The local community in Moda is very interested in the work of the artists, as well as the artists themselves.

What are the benefits halka art/ project has gained from directing a residency programme so far?

Hosting international artists in our residency programme – we have had almost 90 artists in residence to date – has brought a new perspective and balance to our project. We had initially imagined *halka* as a local art initiative that would feature local artists in contemporary art exhibitions. The residency programme has allowed us to work as a facilitator of artistic and cultural exchange between the local art community and artists from abroad. Word of mouth is also helpful – artists who have enjoyed their time in our residency share their experiences with their own professional circles. It's extremely gratifying to hear that artists are pleased with our management skills and hospitality, and that they're sharing these thoughts with others.

Can you talk to us about financing? How have your previous residents funded their stay, or how did you find funds to invite them?

Financing an independent art organization is incredibly difficult in Turkey. The current funding structures are not compatible with the needs of smaller groups like us, even though we are closely connected with contemporary art circles abroad and can collaborate with these groups on global contemporary productions. Since there are no autonomous public bodies like, for example, the Arts Council in the UK, the main way to receive funding is through private sponsorships on a project or institution basis. It's often the case that small initiatives like us can't match the expectations or selection criteria for these large private grants. As a result, we have to create our own funding and also help artists do the same. Luckily most international artists have access to various support systems and we support them in their applications for these funds. Almost 80% of our residents came with funds or grants from one of these international arts organisations.

How long do you think artists should stay in order to have a successful residency?

From what we've seen, the first week of a residency is spent getting to know the environment, the city and getting all the necessary materials – it's a warm-up of sorts. We recommend that the residency last at least four weeks, otherwise it can be difficult to make any progress. Residents who spent two to three months with us produced the most fruitful and satisfying projects, both for themselves and for the audience.

Is there anything about the programme that you would like to change or improve? And what would you tell prospective residents looking into it?

We've been happy with the programme so far and want to keep it running smoothly. The only goal for 2016 is to be more selective. We can host three projects at a time, but in the future we may stick to a single project until it ends and has been thoroughly presented to the local art scene.



We want to feel more engaged with the residency projects, to explore more and to develop our audience and ourselves as well. And since *halka* is not only an artist residency, we have to be totally confident about our balance between the residency programme and our local art initiative and exhibitions.

Moreover, we have to use our gallery space for the benefit of the most possible people because we know that there are artists or groups in Istanbul who have not been able to find a space to exhibit their work. So we are trying to find best solutions for using a limited space in the most effective and efficient way.

Do you stay in touch or continue to work on projects with the artists after they leave?

Yes, we definitely stay in touch. Sometimes they share their new projects with us and we invite them to display in our group shows with local artists, so the residency programme is really a starting point for new relationships and future collaborations. We have quite a number of artists, writers and curators who come back for a second or even a third residency at *halka*, and it is not a question of close proximity, because these repeat residents are coming from all over the world, such as France, Spain, USA, Taiwan, Australia and so on.

Can you tell us about both your most recent and upcoming projects?

We had a very productive period at the end of 2015. We had two distinguished exhibition projects created by residents Ryan Griffith and Slobodan Dan Paich. Griffith, a novelist, created a fictional open call to search for his twin brother Jacob, who was allegedly lost in Istanbul. With marvellous contributions from our artist friends, neighbours and the audience in general, he made a remarkable exhibition in *halka art/gallery*. Paich, a theatre director and professor of art whose first residency at *halka* was in 2012, initiated and directed a series of joint exhibitions and performances with the collaboration of *halka art/project* and Artship Initiatives, San Francisco.

We also organized two independent group exhibitions. One was titled *Gods and Heroes* and featured 12 local artists: Onur 'abdülaziz' Öztekin, Özalp Eröz, Doğu Çankaya, Cins, Rafet Arslan, Ekin İdiman, Nazlı Çetiner, Mehmetcan Serinkaya, Mahlukat, Gözde Kırksekiz, Kadir Yiğit Us and Kristal Güngörün. The project focused on issues of power and protection in relationships, with a focus on the grotesque and fantastic. The exhibition presented totems, emblems, talismans, altars, amulets, fetishistic objects and animal gods that the artists created.

The other exhibition was titled *Feeling at Home*. It presented works made by Meichen Waxer and Michael Irvine, two former residents, in early 2015. The third artist in the show was Serinkaya, whose photographic work related closely to what the other two artists had created while in Istanbul.

Currently we are working on an outstanding group exhibition targeted for February-April 2016. The show, titled *The Atlas of the Sleepless*, will occupy the entire *halka art/gallery* space. Seçil Yersel, Yasemin Nur Toksoy, Nalan Yırtmaç, Fulya Çetin, Doğu Çankaya, Sevil Tunaboğlu, Met Öztekin, Gümüş Özdeş, Neriman Polat, Sezgi Abalı, Ekin İdiman, Melis Seviçli, İskender Giray, Şafak Şule Kemancı and Orhan Cem Çetin will be the exhibiting artists. The exhibition will be curated by İpek Çankaya and Sezgi Abalı.



arthere team, from left: OMAR BERAKDAR, ÖYKÜ D...
in front of arthere
Istanbul, 2015
courtesy of arthere

Spotlight: on: ISTANBUL ARTIST RESIDENCIES



YAŞAR K. CANPOLAT
'I BEG YOUR PARDON I COULDN'T
RECOGNIZE YOU, I'VE CHANGED A LOT'
exhibition view at halka art/ gallery
Istanbul, 2013
courtesy of halka art/ project



halka art/ project team, from left:
GÖZDE KIRKSEKİZ, CANSU ATTAL,
GÖKÇE PEKÇAN, İPEK ÇANKAYA,
SEZGİ ABALI ATTAL
in front of halka art/ gallery
courtesy of halka art/ project



PASAJ team, from left:
ELİF BURSALI, SEÇİL YAYLALI, ÖZGÜR
DEMİRCİ, ZEYNEP OKYAY, GIORGIO CAIONE
photo: Korhan Karaörsal for Artful Living