

404 NOT FOUND

by
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404 NOT FOUND

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ABSTRACT

404 NOT FOUND

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MA Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design, 2014

Thesis Advisor: Selim Birsal

Keywords: Absence, Loss, Possibility, Liberation, Presence

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a theoretical examination and process for my works produced in the two years of masters study. The thesis includes the reading the works in the exhibition "404 Not Found" as well as, some of my previous works. The works examined in the thesis contain absence and loss in a different ways. Conceptual, spiritual and physical absence provides us a space where we can freely imagine different possibilities and project our assumptions. The artworks examined in this thesis share the notion of absence as a field of possibility.

ÖZET

404 BULUNAMADI

Sevgi Aka

MA Görsel Sanatlar ve Görsel İletişim Tasarımı, 2014

Tez Danışmanı: Selim Birsal

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yokluk, Kayıp, İhtimal, Özgürleşme, Varlık

Bu tezin yazılış amacı yüksek lisans eğitiminin iki yılında ürettiğim işlerin teorik incelemesi ve sürecini sunmaktır. Tez "404 Bulunamadı" sergisinde yer alan ve daha önce yapmış olduğum çalışmaların okumasını kapsar. İncelenen işlerde yokluk ve kayıp kavramları farklı şekillerde ortaya çıkar. Kavramsal, ruhani ve fiziksel yokluk bize içinde rahatça farklı olasılıkları hayal edebileceğimiz ve varsayımlarımızı yansıtabileceğimiz bir alan sunar. Mercek altına alınan sanat yapıtlarındaki yokluk imkanlar alanı yaratan yokluktur.

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INTRODUCTION

“Lost really has two disparate meanings. Losing things is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing. There are objects and people that disappear from your sight or knowledge or possession; you lose a bracelet, a friend, the key. You still know where you are. Everything is familiar except that there is one item less, one missing element. Or you get lost, in which case the world has become larger than your knowledge of it. Either way, there is a loss of control...
...Of course to forget the past is to lose the sense of loss that is also memory of an absent richness and a set of clues to navigate the present by; the art is not one of forgetting but letting go. And when everything else is gone, you can be rich in loss.”¹

Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate and display the issues related to my body of work of the last two years as well as some of my previous works. I hope to explore certain notions related to the content of my work that arises from my process of producing and thinking or vice versa.

My artistic explorations emerge from my experiences, curiosities, observations and invented games. I experiment, collect, manipulate and make sense out of what is around me. Sometimes I set a system where the limits are drawn and then open up the transformation to different factors such as interaction or diverse techniques. I use a variety of media focusing on the concepts of loss, void, lack, precarity, multiplicity, process, chance, play and interaction.

Until 2012, my work arose from my frustration with the injection of noise with successive iterations of retelling, transmission of information and translation. However, starting my MA study, I concentrated on physical, conceptual and spiritual loss.

Everything in the world is in transformation. In this cycle there are voids that are constantly filled. For instance, when I complete a work and I document it, I prefer to take it away from my view, put it aside, to make room for the new work to come. Michelangelo Pistoletto's lines reflect a similar approach: "Every piece I make is a liberation and not a construction intended to represent me. Every piece I make is destined to proceed on its own way by itself, without dragging me along behind it, since I am already somewhere else and doing something different."²

The intellectual, spiritual and physical loss provides us a space where we can freely dream of different possibilities. The lack of information allows us to project fantasies and assumptions on a particular issue. Furthermore, loss or absence offers a range of possibility for the new to come.

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, 2006, 22.

² Michelangelo Pistoletto, "The Speculation", *Famous Last Words*, (Turin, 1967), 876.

WORKS



Figure 1 *Ghost* 2013

Ghost, 2013

Canvas print, 240 x 160 cm

The ship bollard (40x60x30 cm) was made out of polyester and painted with graphite powder. The piece *Ghost* is a photograph of a site-specific sculpture (Fig. 1). As the bollard is placed next to a lake, it is waiting for a ship that will never arrive.

Although, the work itself as a physical object is invisible, the photograph of the site-specific sculpture contains the meaning of the work and the location. Also, the existence of the ship bollard near a lake suggest absence of a ship. The existence of a thing suggests the lack of another. *Ghost* creates a dilemma.



Figure 2 Chipped Away, 2013



Figure 3 Chipped Away (Detail), 2013

Chipped Away, 2013
Styrofoam, Acrylic paint, Variable

Styrofoam is carved with a welding machine in order to achieve a certain form. Through the action of carving, the remnants and chips that escape from the primary form look more interesting than the form in the centre. Because the parts I was working on, I touched and manipulated to achieve the form inside, were the pieces that were outputs of

the central form. Thereby, after I attained the form I aimed to obtain in the first place, I decided to continue with the pieces that were chipped away and I discarded the shape I primarily dreamed of.

In the end (Fig. 2, Fig. 3), I placed the remaining pieces after carving on the floor in a wavy way leaving an empty square in the middle as it was the base of the prior form. Accordingly, the composition of pieces of various sizes started dispersing around the empty square of 70 x 70 cm from dense to loose, forming a larger circle. Anish Kapoor says in an interview with Heidi Reitmaier: “I made a drawing (Fig. 4) about thirty years ago which relates to this. It is a computer drawing of a circle changing into a square. I determined the two ends; the computer 'imagined' the rest.”³

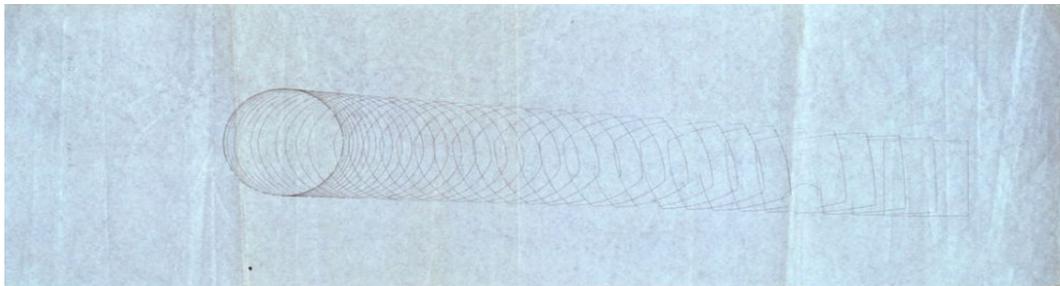


Figure 4 Diagram by Anish Kapoor, 1973
<http://anishkapoor.com/331/Diagram.html>

As, the pieces remaining out of carving carry the memory and the process of this transformation, I attempted to show square to circle transition only through the traces of the action and not the result. When a stone plunges into the water, one can observe its impact spreading around in waves, however, the stone already disappears in the depths of the water. Similarly, in this piece the remnants of a carved object is actually the effect and the response of a particular action.

Besides, the welded and melted pieces of styrofoam carved out of the initial form has archaeological, architectural and organic associations. If one was to trace back how the sculpture was done by gathering the traces and remnants, one would obtain infinite number of possibilities regarding what was there in the middle. The intellectual, spiritual and physical loss offers us a space where our assumptions and fantasies can freely be reflected.

³ Anish Kapoor in Conversation with Heidi Reitmaier <http://anishkapoor.com/177/In-conversation-with-Heidi-Reitmaier.html> (accessed in 03.05.2014).



Figure 5 Gordon Matta-Clark, *Building Cuts*, 70s. <http://stationtostation.com/gordon-matta-clarks-food/>

For instance, the artist and architect Gordon Matta-Clark performed a deconstruction by removing parts of walls (Fig. 5) and hence, liberating the enormous restricted forces of the building⁴. In this way of subtracting, he was revealing what was once unseen. As a part of the Anarchitecture group, Matta-Clark focused on metaphoric voids, gaps, and leftovers as well as ambiguous spaces and considered it “improper” models of space which were interrupting daily life. Moreover, in the 70s he wrote about the group Anarchitecture: “A response to cosmetic design, completion through removal, completion through collapse, completion through emptiness.”⁵

As a result, loss or removal is not necessarily negative. It might actually open up the way and offer us a new way of seeing the world. It does not give answers, rather leaves you with questions and blanks in which each person fills in their own way. An infinite amount of possibility lies in this emptiness.

⁴ Pamela M. Lee, *Object to be destroyed: the work of Gordon Matta-Clark*. (MIT Press, 2001), 67.

⁵ Lee, 104.

The Colors of Camarasaurus Dinosaurs are Scientifically Unknown, 2013-...

A3 Photocopies of the coloring page, dry paint set of 12, 42 x 30 cm



Figure 6 *The Colors of Camarasaurus Dinosaurs are Scientifically Unknown*, colored by one of the participants

In the first stage, the Camarasaurus page out of a dinosaur coloring book was reproduced by a photocopy. Later on these photocopies were given to participants and they colored these pages with twelve dry paints within the limits of ten minutes. This process still continues (Fig. 6).

In the exhibition the colored pages are displayed on the wall. In addition, extra photocopies and colouring pencils are placed on a table near by for the voluntary viewer to fill in and paint their own camarasaurus. They are free to stick them on the wall and add to the existing pictures. The dry paint of twelve used by 85 participants, diminished in correlation to peoples assumptions or fantasies of dinosaurs are also displayed at the end (Fig. 7). Following this exhibition, I will gather all the colored pages in a book.



Figure 7 The Dry Paint of 12 after being used by 85 participants

Regarding the content of the work, I am interested in how the absence is filled. Dinosaurs are creatures that faded away from our world. They were not seen by any human eye and our acquaintance of them is not first hand. Also the knowledge regarding their colours was left incomplete. I find this similar to colouring books where the outline is indicated, however the inside is filled according to the subjectivity of the individual. Lacking visual is filled with ones own subjectivity, imagination and presumptions. The contributors who painted the camarasaurus dinosaurs were in a sense, suggesting colours to the camarasaurus's with unknown colours. As they project their subjectivities into the empty form, any one of the suggestions could actually be the reality. At least there is no finding which proves otherwise.

Maurice Blanchot explains through his influence Stephane Mallarmé, that language is a negation.⁶ Language, while negating the reality of the thing represented, communicates the idea of it. According to both Blanchot and Mallarme, this rupture is the power of language that for the sake of the idea, it negates the concrete thing. It vanishes the object. Thus, destructivity of language could be perceived as positive. The lack of the thing substitutes the presence of the concept.⁷

Similarly, lack of the information on the colours allows us to project fantasies and assumptions on a particular issue. Here, the idea of a thing could be assimilated to the camarasaurus dinosaur and the word is the way in which participants fill in the colors for them according to their idea of the camarasaurus.

⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 30.

⁷ Blanchot, 32.



Figure 8 *All That's Left from Bedia*, 2013

All That's Left from Bedia, 2013

LED spot lights, distance sensor, Arduino, Mp3 player shield, pedestal, plates.

The interactive installation *All That's Left from Bedia* (Fig. 8) consists of five plates on a pedestal at the end of a corridor or a narrow space. There are distance sensors dimming the spot light on top of the plates as the viewer approaches it. The more one approaches the plates, the darker it gets. However, when one is far from the pedestal the plates are in bright light. Also, as one approaches, he hears the sound of five people eating on those plates.

There are distance sensors, LED spot lights, a MP3 player shield and a speaker attached to an Arduino. The levels of light and recorded sound of 5 people eating on the plates displayed varies according to the position of the viewer relative to the plates. The lights are hung by the cables on top of the pedestal thus from the ceiling and the speakers are hidden inside the pedestal.

The piece *All That's Left from Bedia* delves into the notion of memory and how much of it is changed over time. The sensory deprivation experienced is reflecting our

relationships with the lost information, the (in)ability to grasp our dreamlike memories and how it is changed in time. The five plates represent five people who carry my original grandmother Bedia in their memories since sixty years. This group of plates is the only thing that is left behind Bedia as well as the memories of five people.

The interactive installation *All That's Left from Bedia*, is an outcome of a rather long process of reflection and contemplation. It is about my grandmother who died after giving birth to my father. Later on my grandfather married another woman who looked after my father and the family grew further. I see Bedia`s death as a glitch in the family tree. After her death at the age of twenty four the absence was filled, the family grew and she became a taboo.

The people alive who know Bedia are my grandfather and her four cousins who are in their 80s, 90s. When I was in Chicago I used to meet one of Bedia`s cousins, Gündüz who lives there. From time to time, I would remind her of Bedia and she would share her memories of Bedia. Then, I realised that for her the centre point of our relationship is my grandmother who is out of my reality. I was extremely interested in this notion of having very different realities and getting to know my original grandmother all the way in Chicago, through someone`s memory.

Inquiring further, I found out that the only thing left to us from Bedia is an antique crockery which, we use for special dinners. I was not necessarily concerned about having a documentary approach to my grandmother. Instead, I was very interested in **how she emerged into my life, and how she disappeared, in a metaphorical sense.**

The five people who know Bedia carry a memory of her since 60 years. Most of the stories they tell me are about her childhood and youth. Does the memory stay loyal to the reality or does it change in time? As every memory recall is a recreation, every time we remember our past we filter it from our present perspective, Bedia`s memory is already mediated.

As Maurice Blanchot states in *The Space of Literature*,

“Memory still bears witness to this active force. It frees me from what otherwise would recall me; it frees me by giving me the means of calling freely upon the past, of ordering it according to my present intention. Memory is freedom of the past.”⁸

Perhaps working and reflecting on this issue of the past, I was also searching for my own freedom.

8 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 29.

This work is inspired by Bruce Nauman's "*Live-Taped Video Corridor*" (1970) (Fig. 9). Nauman's *Live Taped Video Corridor* uses both live and taped video monitors at the end of a corridor. The upper monitor shows live record of the camera positioned three meters high at the entrance. While one enters the corridor, looks at the monitor mounted three meters high expecting to see oneself. However, it shows a tape of the empty corridor. As one approaches the monitors, and walks further from the camera, as a result, the image in the monitor becomes smaller at the bottom monitor. Additionally, your image is from behind. It causes irritation and sensory deprivation. The work delves into the differences of expectations and memories. I was inspired by Nauman's corridor because of its simplicity and contradiction it creates in sensory experience and thought.⁹



Figure 9 Bruce Nauman, *Live-Taped Video Corridor*, 1970.
http://annex.guggenheim.org/collections/media/full/92.4165_ph_web.jpg

⁹ Bruce Kurtz, "*Video Is Being Invented*". *Arts Magazine* 47.3, 1973, 43.

Apology, 2012

Egg shells, 6 x 6 x 6 cm



Figure 12 *Apology* 2012

In *Apology* (Fig.12), I cracked eggshells of different colours, ate the egg and glued the cracks back together in the form of a globe. It was put together with more than one egg shell, since in order to achieve the largest globe, one has to use the least curved shell parts. Thus, I used several egg shells to obtain a form close to a globe.

Apologising is breaking, eating what is inside and then attempting to repair it. The effort is to make it as it was not broken. The hollowness inside remains visible and repair can never be as it was before. An apology can not undo what was broken.

Eating the egg and glueing the shells could be perceived as an analogy of western countries exploiting Africa and then centuries later, lending a hand to them. *Apology* has personal and political dimensions. It questions the human conscience and the instinct of reconciliation.

EXTRA WORKS

Letters of Shadow Puppets, 2012, Video 0'55" Loop



Figure 10 *Letters of Shadow Puppets*, 2012 Video Still



Figure 11 *Letters of Shadow Puppets*, 2012 Video Still

The *Letters of Shadow Puppets* (Fig. 10, Fig. 11) is a video capturing a site-specific installation of twisting venetian blinds, with a text of conversation stuck on each side of the slats. It is therefore, a representation of the experience of communication. The conversation belongs to the traditional shadow puppets Karagoz and Hacivat who are well known regarding their misunderstandings of each other due to their divergent cultural backgrounds and their word plays. Karagoz Hacivat shadow play, widespread around 16th century Ottoman period until mid-20th century, serves as a vehicle to discuss the idea of

miscommunication, the transmission of information and how we receive information.

During the journey of information it passes through different agents, gets reinterpreted each time and loses its essence. In order to discuss these issues, in *The Letters of Shadow Puppets*, an analogy of venetian blinds was used. These kinds of blinds composed of slats symbolize a space in between that defines the relationship of the inside and outside and the transition phase where the connection happens. The objective is to invite the viewer to see what happens between a receiver and sender in a communication through a physical and daily object. Hence, this work is not answering a question or making a claim, however creating a situation where these issues can be reflected upon.

Three years after I've done the work and exhibited in diverse spaces, I came across the book "*Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*" which opens up with the following quote in the introduction:

*"The following is not exactly a dialogue, although in places it resembles an exchange that might actually have taken place between two interlocutors. Yet, one will notice as well a certain inconstancy in this resemblance. It is perhaps a typographical rather than a dialogic form that has imposed itself here, the back and forth of more than one "voice" requiring the convention of blank intervals across the page. These, in turn, could be thought of as the slats of a venetian blind, or a jalousie, which partially obstructs the view."*¹⁰

As seen in the quote, the exchange between two interlocutors was associated with slats of a venetian blind requiring blank intervals. Likewise, in the video a 55 second static shot of a simple action of twisting blinds control the amount of light coming in, as well as obstructing the view. In between the rotations of the slats the strong light of the sun shines from outside, wiping out the lines of the slats from the viewer's vision. Also, if one can read either Karagoz's or Hacivat's sentences on either side, this means that blinds would be closed; therefore, the light and the view is blocked. We -as people standing inside- are in shadow. One can only see outside in silence; when neither Karagoz, nor Hacivat is speaking.

Additionally, an inspiration to this work is a quote from Paul Virilio's *Open Sky*:¹¹ "While the topical City was once constructed around the 'gate' and the 'port', the teletopical metacity is now reconstructed around the 'window' and the teleport, that is to say, around the screen and the time slot." Virilio compares the topical city, which involved physical experience, and teletopical city where communities experienced life from a

10 Jacques Derrida, *A Derrida reader: Between the blinds*. (Columbia University Press, 1991), xiii.

11 Paul Virilio, *Open sky*. Vol. 35. (Verso Books, 1997), 26.

distance. The analogy of window has influenced this video installation. In a topical city, individuals acquired information or accessed the world first hand, whereas in teletopical metacity everything is experienced second hand, through a filter, which is the screen. The video of venetian blinds on the window represents this particular window (screen) where the information is received through a filter, mediated.



Figure 13 *The Kiss 1*, 2010



Figure 14 *The Kiss 2*, 2010

The Kiss, 2010

Wood Craft Models, 15 x 35 x 30 (Approximate)

The series *The Kiss* (Fig. 13, Fig. 14) was created with the 3D wooden craft

models of various kinds of dinosaurs. The dinosaur skeleton puzzle recreates the bone structure of the dinosaurs. They are made of pre-cut plywood sheets of 3mm. In each kit there are about twenty pieces of interlocking wooden dinosaur bone pieces ready for assembling by pressing out (pop out), therefore there is no need for glue.

For *The Kiss*, I assembled the dinosaur from the construction kit. Afterwards, I constructed its partner by using the remaining plywood. I broke the 3mm plywood and glued the pieces back together attempting to create a dinosaur as similar as the first one. In other words, the dinosaur is assembled with the pre-cut bones pressed out from the plywood. Then, with the remaining plywood after the pre-cut pieces are taken, the second dinosaur is born. Accordingly, I have created two dinosaurs from a whole, separating each.



Figure 15 Constantin Brancusi *The Kiss*

<http://www.actingoutpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/BRANCUSI-the-kiss-sculpture-constantin-brancusi.jpg>

The title of the work *The Kiss* (Fig. 15) is a reference to Constantin Brancusi's serial sculpture with the same title. However, in Brancusi's piece the kissing couple form a whole. On the other hand, by deconstructing the wooden construction kit, I divide a whole completely, create a counterpart for the "original" dinosaur and contact them with a kiss. If a dinosaur occupies the negative space, the other is occupying the positive. They have nothing in common yet they come together with a kiss.

The notion of the double is expressed through Michelangelo Pistoletto's words: "Man has always attempted to double himself as a means of attempting to know himself". He added: "The mind created representation on the basis of the reflection of the self. And

art has become one of the specialties of this representation." .¹²

He goes on to explain, that the mentally and physically inhabited world contains various conflicts of two radical halves of every offer and every assessment. Moreover, art's ambiguity originates in placing two things in relationship, in order to investigate the depiction of their conflict.¹³

The last quote from the artist Pistoletto strengten my concerns in *The Kiss*: "We believed that the day and the night were but a single thing with two possibilities, that life and death were but a single thing with two possibilities, that the intellect was a single thing with two possibilities".¹⁴ Similarly, skeletons of dinosaurs were used to be a single thing from which two possibilities were born. Whereas, it connects with my thesis of the notion of absence is a single thing which provides infinite number of possibilities.



Figure 16 15.11.11, 2011 and 13.03.13, 2013

15.11.11, 2011 and 13.03.13, 2013

A4 Paper, Thread, 21 x 29 x 0,2 cm

Out of curiosity, in 15.11.11, I made a sound recording of everything I said in a single day while I was in Chicago. Later on I listened to the recording and typed down my speech. Then I seperated each word of a sentence and put them in alphabetical order. The list of words has become a book of A4 paper (Fig. 16) which I binded by sewing with a thread.

12 Michelangelo Pistoletto, "The Speculation", *Famous Last Words*, (Turin, 1967), 873.

13 Pistoletto, 875.

14 Pistoletto, 876.

CONCLUSION

Through out this extended artist statement in the form of a thesis, I tried to provide a reading of my works. Its preparation led me to discover that despite their divergence, my works share common notions at a theoretical level. Consequently, through understanding my artworks, my process of working, thinking and finding out the commonalities between each of my works, I am understanding how I think and how I deal with the world.

For instance, during the transmission of information there is a loss of essence. Also the inability to experience the information first hand is a reoccurring concept where a void emerges in the route of information. An example of this is the lack of knowledge of the camarasaurus dinosaur resulted as imaginary shapes and colours suggested for them. Within the conceptual or physical void where the limits of the system is not drawn, one can act freely, setting his/her own borders and/or horizons.

As Blanchot suggests while relating it to *Igitur*, exploration of absence is an attempt of making absence possible and gleaning possibility from it.¹⁶ For him, it is about finding satisfaction in extreme dissatisfaction and possibility in extreme negativity where he refers to death.¹⁷

Loss, either physical, conceptual or spiritual, offers a range of possibilities. In the transformation cycle one thing or aspect is replaced with another, thus there is an emptiness that is filled by time. My process of working reflects this notion of emptiness being replaced with the new. The void is necessary for the change to take place. Compared to existence, absence offers a wider range of possibilities, thereby absence is more than existence. It is a space for creativity and freedom.

¹⁶ Blanchot, 109.

¹⁷ Blanchot, 90.

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<http://stationtostation.com/gordon-matta-clarks-food/> Accessed in 25.05.2014.

APPENDIX: (FIGURES)



Figure 18 *Letters of Shadow Puppets* exhibition view at Maumauworks, On Paper



Figure 19 *Letters of Shadow Puppets* exhibition view at Maumauworks, On Paper

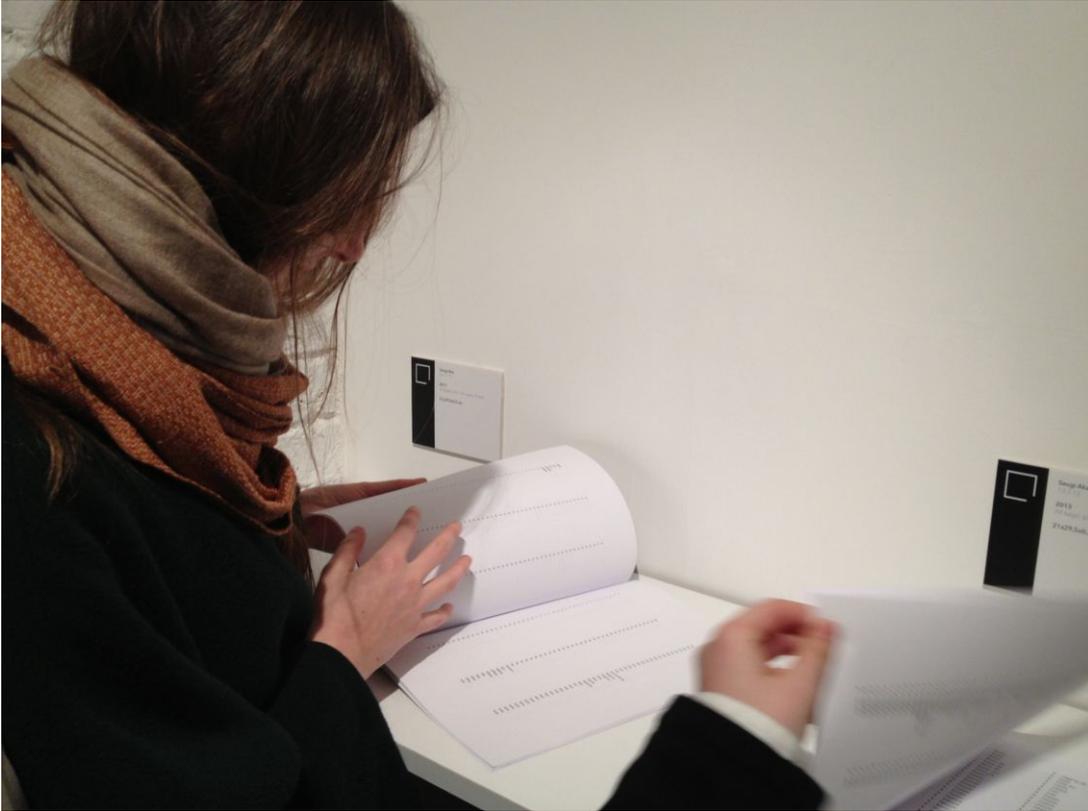


Figure 20 15.11.11 and 13.3.13 exhibition view at Tankut Aykut Gallery, Character

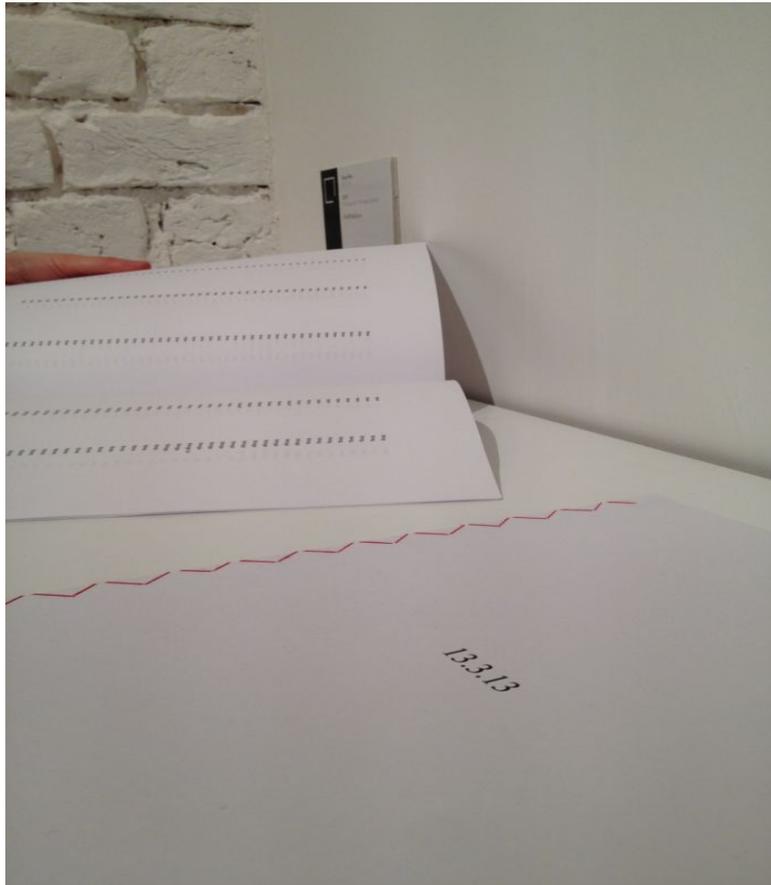


Figure 21 15.11.11 and 13.3.13 exhibition view at Tankut Aykut Gallery, Character

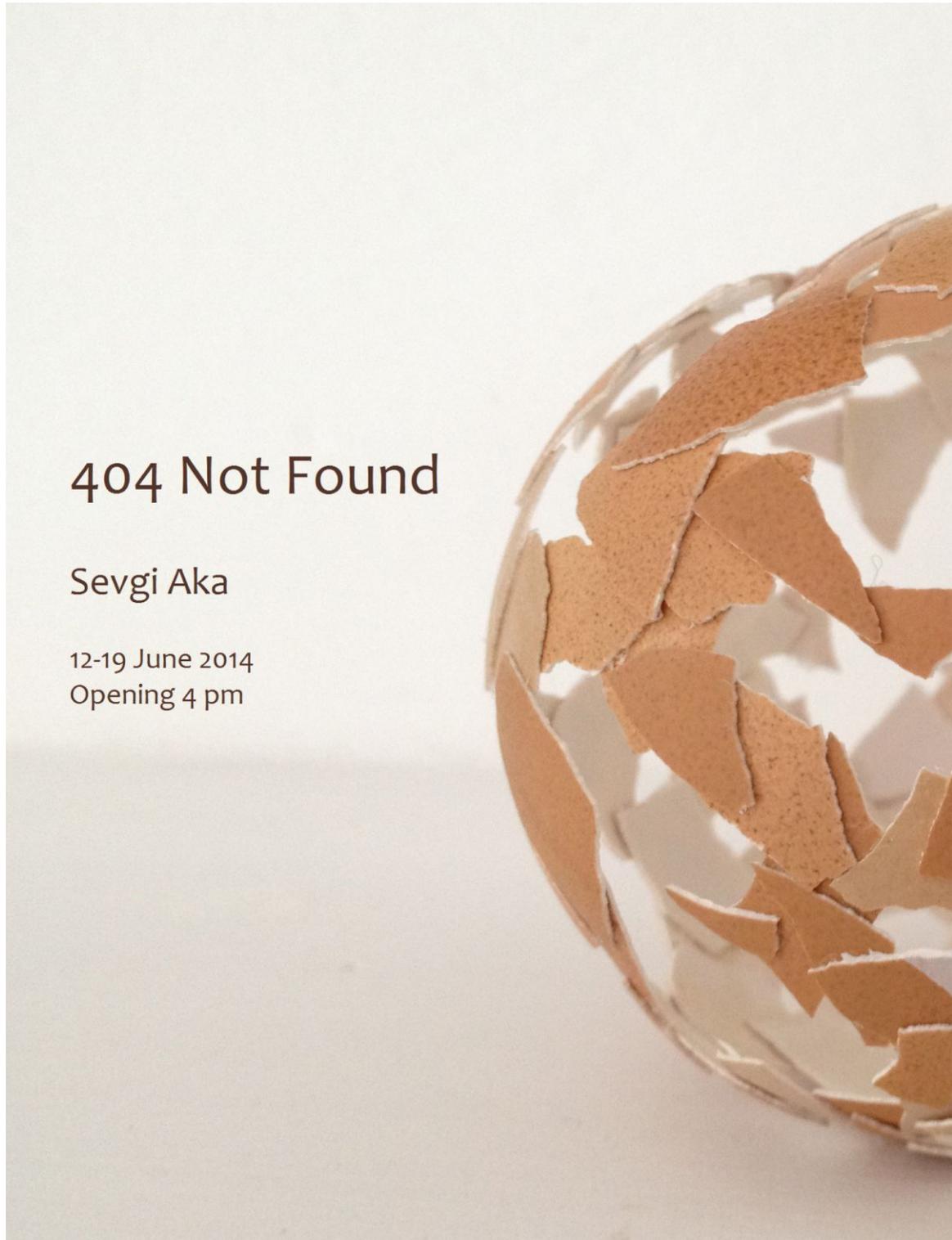


Figure 22 404 Not Found Exhibition Poster at Fass Art Gallery



Figure 23 *Apology, Chipped Away and All That is Left From Bedia*, 404 Not Found Exhibition view



Figure 24 *Ghost, Apology, The Colors of Camarasaurus Dinosaurs are Scientifically Unknown*, 404 Not Found Exhibition view



Figure 25 *The Colors of Camarasaurus Dinosaurs are Scientifically Unknown*



Figure 26 *The Colors of Camarasaurus Dinosaurs are Scientifically Unknown (Detail).*



Figure 27 *Chipped Away*



Figure 28 *Ghost*

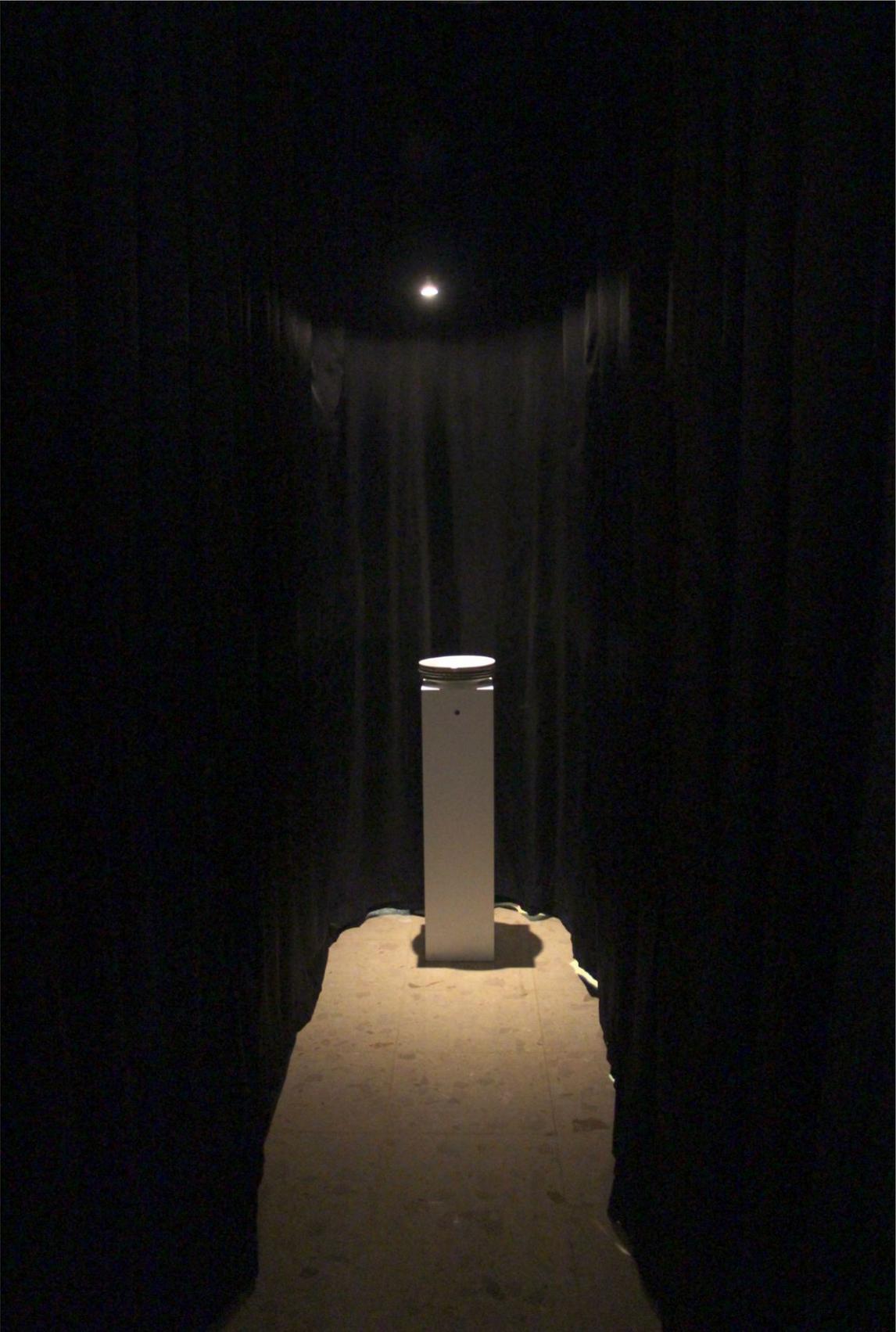


Figure 29 All That's Left from Bedia



Figure 30 *Apology*