

“GEN BENCİLDİR” / THE SELFISH GENE

by

ADNAN YILDIZ

SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN VISUAL ARTS VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

SABANCI UNIVERSITY

SPRING 2004

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10.07.2004

Approval of the Institute of Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Nakiye Boyacıgiller
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Prof. Dr. Ahmet Alkan
Dean

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Associate Prof. Erdağ Aksel
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Name

Associate Prof.
Wieslaw Zaremba

Name

Assistant Prof. Dr.
Hasan Bülent Kahraman

Name

Faculty. Selim Birsal

Name

Invited Artist Hale Tenger

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ABSTRACT

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Adnan Yıldız

M.F.A., Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design

Supervisor: Erdağ Aksel

Spring 2004, v + 50 pages

This is a supplementary text that investigates the process of the exhibition, “gen bencildir / the selfish gene” and can not be considered separately from it. In the first part, it introduces the process of working with wire and later discusses the works in terms of space and light. It focuses on the theorization of the works, in the context of body politics regarding the concepts of bodies and *incompleteness*.

Key words: body, space, light, incompleteness, chicken wire, wire mesh, performance.

ÖZ

“GEN BENCİLDİR” / THE SELFISH GENE

Adnan Yıldız

Görsel Sanatlar Görsel İletişim Tasarımı Yüksek Lisans Programı

Tez Danışmanı: Yard. Prof. Erdağ Aksel

Bahar 2004, 50 sayfa

Bu, sürecini araştırdığı “gen bencildir / the selfish gene” sergisini destekleyici bir çalışmadır ve sergiden ayrı bir metin olarak konumlandırılmaz. İlk olarak, tellerle çalışma süreci anlatılır ve daha sonra işlerin ışık ve mekanla ilişkileri tartışılır. İşlerin beden politikaları bağlamında, bedenler ve tamamlanmamışlık kavramları açısından nasıl teorik olarak değerlendirildiği incelenmektedir.

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Thanks to Karasipahi family for their love and support. Thanks to my grandmother Fatma Karasipahi, my father Ayhan Yıldız, my mother Gülseren Yıldız, my sister Sena Yıldız... *Gene is selfish!* Thanks to Nimet Gürbüzkol and Şerife Akkuş... *my beautiful childhood.*

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People always say so, but I think it is true! It was a process...

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INTRODUCTION

This is a supplementary text that can not be considered separately from the exhibition, “gen bencildir / *the selfish gene*” (June 1-15, 2004). Objects resembling bodies shaped with chicken wire are displayed in the exhibition along with a video titled, “*Limbo.*” The video is made up of images of some of the works shown simultaneously with the footage of laboratory quails in their cages and at the testing lab. In the video, the shadows of the mesh bodies and the close-up footage of quails are used in the sequence of four screens.

The modest aim of this text is to point out to some issues related to the works and to express my thoughts regarding the process experienced in a particular graduate study program at Sabancı University Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design. It would be pretentious for me to claim to write on my works as an art critic or an art historian.

Instead, *I would like to speak for myself as myself...*

The reason I decided to study visual arts at the master’s level is related to what this project is constructed on. Having studied psychology and educational sciences on the undergraduate level, I was trained to deal with *the strategies of disciplining the self and others*. I found psychology a rather limited discipline with its predefined methods, statistical measurements and the ethics of a laboratory where information *rather than knowledge* is produced. The responses of subjects (or *guinea pigs*) are evaluated as scores to find a relation between ratios. For instance, in the laboratory that I worked as an assistant, quails are observed and recorded in order to measure their responses to some stimulus given for the sake of the experiment. The quails are no more than their responses, that’s to say they are only seen

as scoring machines, producing numbers that serve as the proof of a particular hypothesis.

“Studies with 111 subjects show that...”

There is a kind of isolation or alienation in the laboratory. These sensations are what are perceived through intuitions but can not be justified by a *t-test*¹. Within the borders of psychology, there is no room to articulate the alienation experienced in the laboratory. Nevertheless the laboratory has a visual identity and a visual language. It also speaks *visually* as does every space and every object surrounding us. I was more interested to read and write in that language. At about this time I began to explore art that did not seem to be bounded to rationality and objectivity that most science claims. Art also seemed to have a tendency and potential to transform everything into itself with an insatiable hunger. In our day, art can be positioned at a very critical place. It does not simply involve the problematic of beauty but also the mind. Many works are conceptualized on the basis of political, philosophical, and social issues.

The exhibition *“gen bencildir / the selfish gene”* is the product of such a process of transition *“from laboratory to the studio”* at Sabancı University Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design class-rooms and studios. There I have been exposed to various histories, theories, and techniques of art. I have tried to find the ways of synthesizing my accumulation of knowledge with the questions of art, so far.

During the process, I have begun to focus my work on representation, attachment methods and styles, space, surface, and time. First I used chicken wire as a material for a

¹ The t test employs the statistic (**t**) to test a given statistical hypothesis about the mean of a population (or about the means of two populations). (from Internet Glossary of Statistical Terms)
<http://www.animatedsoftware.com/statglos/sqtest.htm> (02.06.2004)

project, entitled “*bigger than me*”. The objective of the project was to emphasize the concept of surface and “*skin like*” in a size that was two or three times bigger than my body size. I installed a square layer of wire mesh (3m x 3m) attaching it from the three edges to the ceiling. One of the edges was hanging down towards a busy hallway area, activating the public space. The square was twisting in the air. There was also a white square produced with flour on the ground like a white shadow of the twisted wire. (Figure 1-2)

Later, I was just playing and exploring the material; chicken wire. I started to make small objects resembling a cat or a duck. (Figure 3-4) I did not call them “*art pieces*”. One day, I made a cat-like figure constructed of wire for my flat mate. The story was that we had a small cat that she did not want to leave it at home. I made the *wire cat* for her, to keep her company. I thought she might look at the cat-like figure whenever she missed her cat. The result was a surprise for me, because in the studio the *wire-cat* was found “*very sincere and impressive*” and this situation motivated me to keep working with wire.

The Relation of Space and Light with Bodies

As time passed, I have explored different ways of shaping wire. I concentrated on two main ways that also imply two different artistic attitudes. One way is to shape the wire mesh by hand in order to make a cat-like figure. The material is used like modeling clay. It can be considered as an additive sculptural method. In the second method, I use my body as a mould; that’s to say, I shape and form the flat material using my own body as a model and a positive mould. This method obviously involves a *performative* process. The wire is placed on the floor, and I shape it sitting or rolling on it. I use my body as a loose *reference* for size and proportion. I cut the wire as I shape it through my body. The body shapes constructed of wire-mesh are the moulds -or the models- of my body. In the book *Art today*, Edward Lucie-Smith

points out that Antony Gormley, like de Andrea, and Hanson and Segal, began by using moulds made from life.² I ‘*replicated*’ *wire bodies* in different movements, forms and styles, with varying gestures. With some figures, I left the leg uncompleted or totally absent, and at another I did the same for the arm or a head.

The first series of *wire bodies*, “*life jackets*” were exhibited at Aksanat / Beyoğlu, Istanbul as a showroom display exhibition, titled as “*tuhaf bir yerde uyandım / i woke up in a strange place*” (January 15-21, 2004). (Figure 5-10) During the process that I worked for the exhibition, I was confronted with the problematic of specific space for the bodies. How to relate them with and within the space(s) or producing them specifically for some places (as site specific installations) became the major pathways of my research. The relation of an art work with its physical, social, political and psychological space is always one of the open ended questions of art. I considered Gormley’s spatial thinking. He installs his sculptures into white cube galleries with very sensitive compositions. He places one or two figures for each room, utilizing the entire space for the figure. His style of installing works impressed me throughout this process.

The wall that I hang my works (*wire bodies*) on is another element for my work, and it is as important as the work itself. Since I have been working with a transparent material, I take into account that they will be better displayed on white walls. The relation between the wall and the figures is like the relation of drawing and a white paper. The *wire-bodies* can be easily called ‘*three dimensional wall drawings*’. (Figure 11) In his article, *The Art of Getting beyond the Surface* that is published in *Turkish Daily News*, Mark Wyers argued that

“... the exhibition was quite successful in attracting attention from both passers-by as well as those deeply involved in the arts, and the reason for its success was the ability of Yıldız’s figures to communicate to a broad

² Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art Today*, (New York: Phaidon Press., 2000) p. 293.

audience on a variety of levels... Yıldız stated that the works called to mind the act of sketching, with grey of the wire of the figures highlighted against the backdrop of white appearing much like a pencil drawing. This presents another contrast, of two dimensional appearance versus a three dimensional reality. It is this tension of appearance versus reality that catches one's eye, and brings to mind, and the heart, the tension that exists between what is seen (illusion) and what is known (reality); for if we push further behind the curtain of this apparent duality, we find a truth that is much more complex, in which reality and illusion are in a state of fluidity that resists capture. Yıldız's work exists in that rich, difficult terrain of the certain and uncertain, of the defined and the undefined, of the possible and the impossible."

The conception of mesh bodies like three dimensional sketching or wall drawing provided a base to try to work in relation to space, especially in relation to architectural aspects, moreover wire as a flexible material pushed me to some trials; combining it with other materials, even with flesh. (Figure 12) During the first half of April 2004, I attended a workshop, organized by Kunst in Kontakt, in Germany. It was an international art project for young artists attending workshops and realizing an exhibition at the end. Under this year's concept "*dark-darkroom*", artists generated works that could communicate using controlled light. I worked with numerous artists at a deserted industrial site that would be destroyed after the project.

As a site- specific installation, I intended to produce a gothic-atmospheric scene using the *wire bodies* I made right there. The installation, in the exhibition "*Darkroom*" (April 6-17, 2004), was titled "*get me away from here I am dying.*" The bodies were made from a single uncut so all figures/bodies were connected to each other from their legs or arms. The arms or leg extensions continued down on the floor. When the viewers walked in the site, they were stepping on or touching the figures continuously moving them. The lights that lit up and created critical shadows were hung low from the ceiling by wires. When the viewers moved in the room, they were also touching the lights, forcing them to move. Along with the wire

figures, lights were also swinging, creating dramatic changes in the room's lighting. At times, the room was getting lighter, and at other times, darker. (Figure 13-16)

By reproducing the figures, installing them within space, and manipulating light installation, my aim was to create atmospheres for the viewer to enter into without being subjected to narration, or to produce such a *mise-en-scène* that did not need a story. As a stage that stands without a play. I try to define the figures as the actors of the stage but also as the elements of the scenery. The light installation is another significant factor in order to create such an effect of influencing perception by putting the light closer to the work or putting strong light; shadows are made a visible kind of *duplicating* the scene. Shadows, like drawings of the wire-figures on the wall, refer to the problem of *visibility and invisibility*. Rather than being a two dimensional representations, wire sculptures are perceived clearly as three dimensional objects when shadows are visible.

Incomplete Bodies

The bodies that are constructed of wire mesh do not only compose atmospheric scenes but they also give a sense of the “*absence of body*.” They have been discussed in the context of ‘body politics.’ by critics in the newspapers. The material, chicken wire, by its nature refers to a disturbing ‘emptiness’ of presence. The body shapes refer to the presence of *someone's* body, which is not there now; as one looks at them. There is a clash between the presence and absence of body. Being hung down, they look “*skin-like*.” They are “*skins*” probably left, perhaps clothes, moulds, and they are as lonely as “*the suit*” of Joseph Beuys.

Emphasizing the aspect of “*incompleteness*” Hasan Bülent Kahraman contextualized the works in *Radikal*, the daily newspaper. Kahraman referred to Michel Foucault and Judith

Butler on the basis of their critical approach to develop a *reading of wire bodies* through their theorizations.

"By a very broad definition and according to his own words, Adnan Yıldız's work comprises bodies made of chicken wire. Some of these are not even the size of the human body. These are works which have been twisted here and intertwined there; however, they have not reached the stage of "completeness", which is probably the most important characteristic of the human body. They only give us a sense that they are human (?) bodies. The very fact that they hang in midair, attached to a piece of wire, or the very fact that they are incomplete, drives us to question why this is so. To me, Yıldız's hollow, incomplete, partial bodies reflect, above all, a reaction to the completeness of the human body."

Kahraman pointed out that the perception of the body is something physical. The process of perceiving it also includes the perception of body as flesh. Kahraman incited from Foucault that *'bodies are disciplined through these processes, and minds are also to be disciplined too'*. In his "Discipline and Punish" Foucault states that *"Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise."*³

The mesh bodies are recently discussed in an academic platform. In the conference of *Queer, Türkiye ve Kimlik / Queer, Turkey and Identity* Cüneyt Çakırlar presented an article about gender and identity, mentioning the *wire bodies*:

"When I have seen the exhibition of Adnan Yıldız in Aksanat, 'I Woke Up in a Strange Place', I am fascinated seeing how all theoretical approaches on sexuality and gender/body/space relationships can be 'installed' into our everyday lives and made our 'incomplete bodies' to witness that exhibition in the showroom of Aksanat on the Istiklal Street. Yıldız created incomplete human bodies from metal coop fibers and hang them. The inspiration to make a long theoretical introduction to my paper is just because this exhibition is an exciting work

³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, (London: Penguin Books, 1977) p. 170.

to demonstrate the 'incompleteness' of the body, 'genderless-ness' of the human and the approach that our sexualities, genders, identities are assigned/installed to us by the heterosexual matrix. We, our bodies, are the fibers reinforcing/weakening the mechanisms of this matrix."

I make *wire bodies* by forming them by my own body; they are shaped by my body. I twist, bent, tease, and wrestle the material using my body. I take reference from myself. They are at times like auto-portraits. Nevertheless, they do not have a remark, a word from me. They do not carry or show anything personal from me. For an outsider, they are incomplete bodies. They do not imply gender, identity or positions. They are the "*life jackets*," that resist to the conditionings of the heterosexual matrix. They imply the notion of '*body*' in our mind, nevertheless they are not the *bodies* that we are accustomed to be / see. Judith Butler's question here correlates with my words:

*"If the body is not a "being," but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender that constitutes its "interior" signification of its surface?"*⁴

CONCLUSION

For the exhibition "gen bencildir / *the selfish gene*," I tried to make an *evolutionary scene*; forms and figures are organized in sequence so that amorphous forms are becoming one legged or two headed figures. The themes of birth, death, and reproduction were what I was thinking about. The hexagon of chicken wire looks like a DNA chromosome, taking different forms in every work. Like a DNA chromosome that is full of surprises what develops, how chicken wire shapes and takes forms of my body with different gestures and expressions each time is unknown. With the figures, I have installed the video, "*Limbo*", in

⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 177.

which quails in their testing laboratory cages, are shown. I believe this exhibition displays the process of my transition from laboratory to the studio; including my observations, strategies and languages that I have learnt through the process. I think it is a starting point of all; moreover I have a long way to go. (Figure 17-29)

Taking its form, *wire bodies* are moulds of my body. I do not give them original names, but I rather borrow names from music, literature or history for my works, in accordance *with their inspirations on me*. For the exhibition at Aksanat, the title, “*i woke up in a strange place*” was a Jeff Buckley’s song (I woke up in a strange place); and the site-specific installation in “Darkroom” in Germany, “*get me away from here I am dying*” took its name from a Belle & Sebastian song (Get me away). The exhibition, “*gen bencildir / the selfish gene*” takes its name from the book of an evolutionary psychologist, Richard Dawkins.

Then, words become their *bodies*...

“*Words themselves become weight bodies, folded over our own... fresh ways of seeing and writing preserves us from becoming dead subjects of language.*”⁵

⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Reading of Exile and Estrangement*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996) p. 13-15.

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Internet Glossary of Statistical Terms: <http://www.animatedsoftware.com/statglos/sgttest.htm>
(02.06.2004)

Songs:

Belle & Sebastien, *If you’re feeling sinister*, (track 06), Jeepster Recording, 1996.

Buckley, Jeff. *Mystery White Boy, Live ’95- ’96*, (track 02), Sony Music, 1994.

APPENDIX



Figure 1 *Site-specific installation 2003*



Figure 2 *Site-specific installation* 2003



Figure 5 Invitation for the exhibition 2004

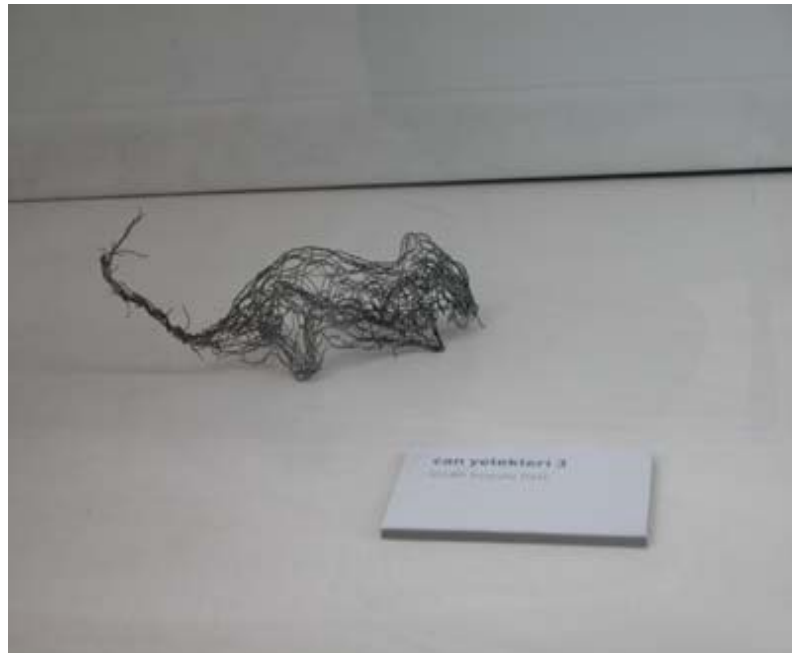


Figure 6 *"tuhaf bir yerde uyandım / i woke up in a strange place"* 2004



Figure 7 *“tuhaf bir yerde uyandım / i woke up in a strange place”* 2004



Figure 8 “*tuhaf bir yerde uyandım / i woke up in a strange place*” 2004

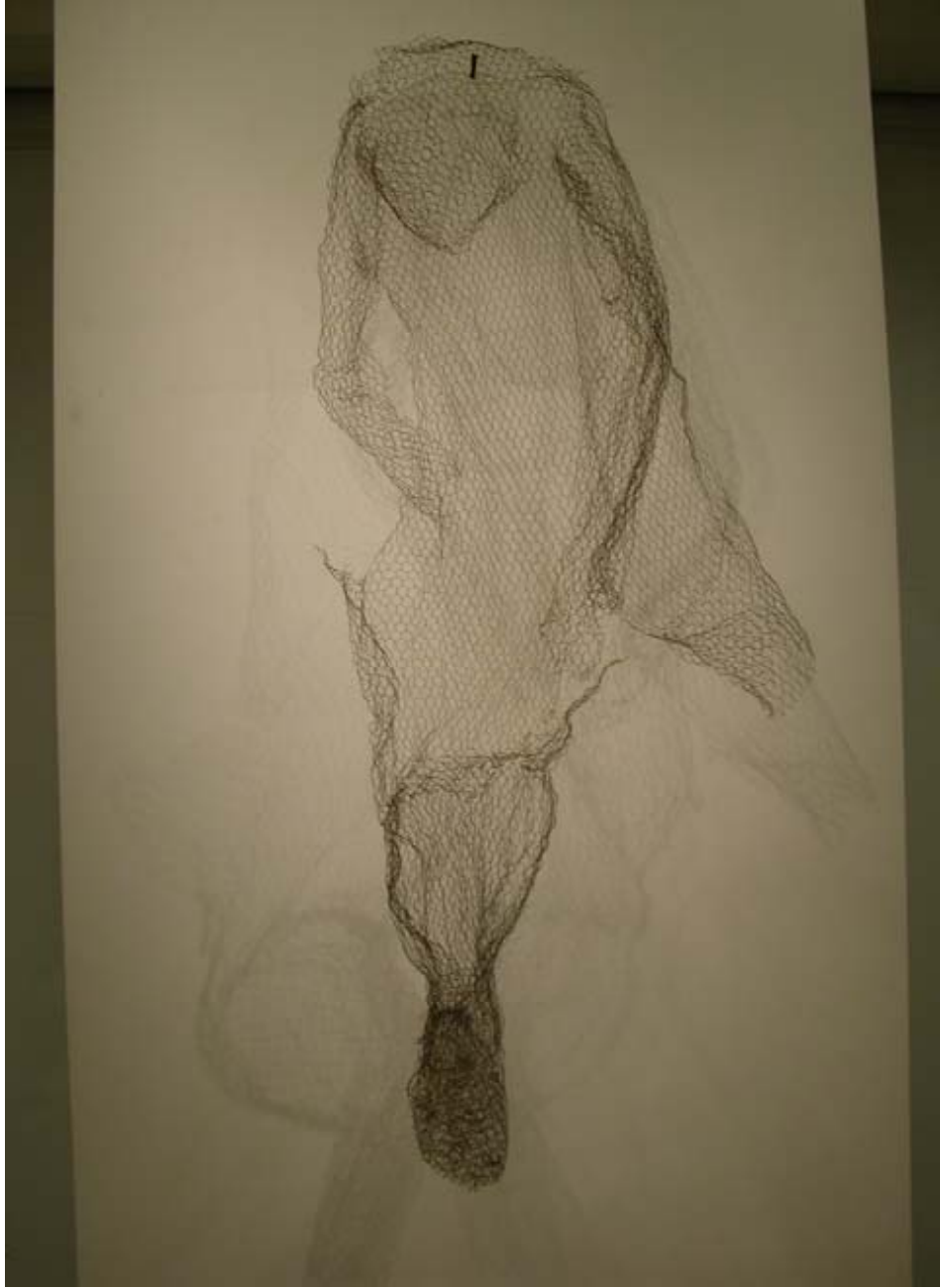


Figure 10 *“tuhaf bir yerde uyandım / i woke up in a strange place”* 2004



Figure 11 *Works in the studio* 2004



Figure 12 *kelle-paça* 2004

"High Experience, Low Budget"

Bir serginin dokümantasyonu

Yer:Kasa Galeri/Karaköy

07/05/2004 Saat:16.00



> "darkroom" 7-17/04/04
Artists-workshop
Continental - Hannover

> "Hidden Place" 17/04/04
KUTU V.German - Hannover

"Darkroom" 2004

Figure 13 *Invitation for Documentation of the exhibition,*



Figure 17 *Invitation for the exhibition 2004*

1. replikalar / the replicants
limbo / limbo
2. 4,5'tan dans / 4,5 makes dance
3. bir günah gibi / like a sin
4. can yelekleri / life jackets
5. bektâşi / bektâşi

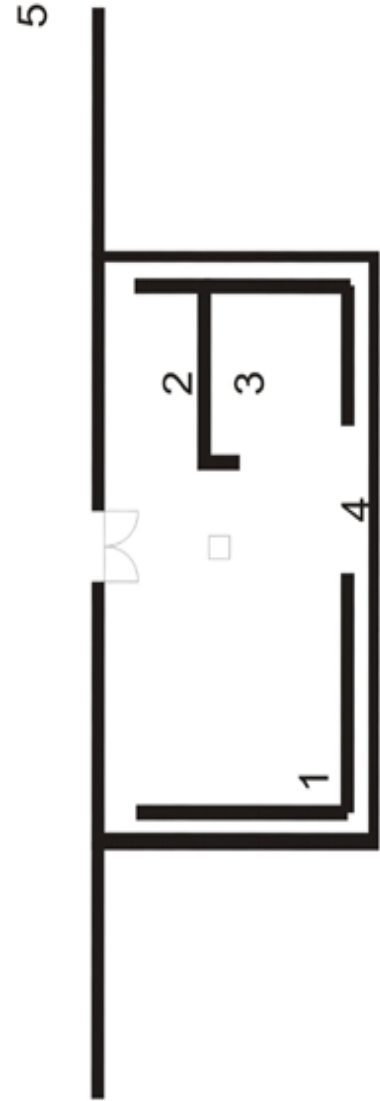


Figure 18 *Plan of the exhibition 2004*





Figure 19 *Poster for the exhibition 2004*



Figure 20 *4,5'tan dans / 4,5 makes dance 2004*

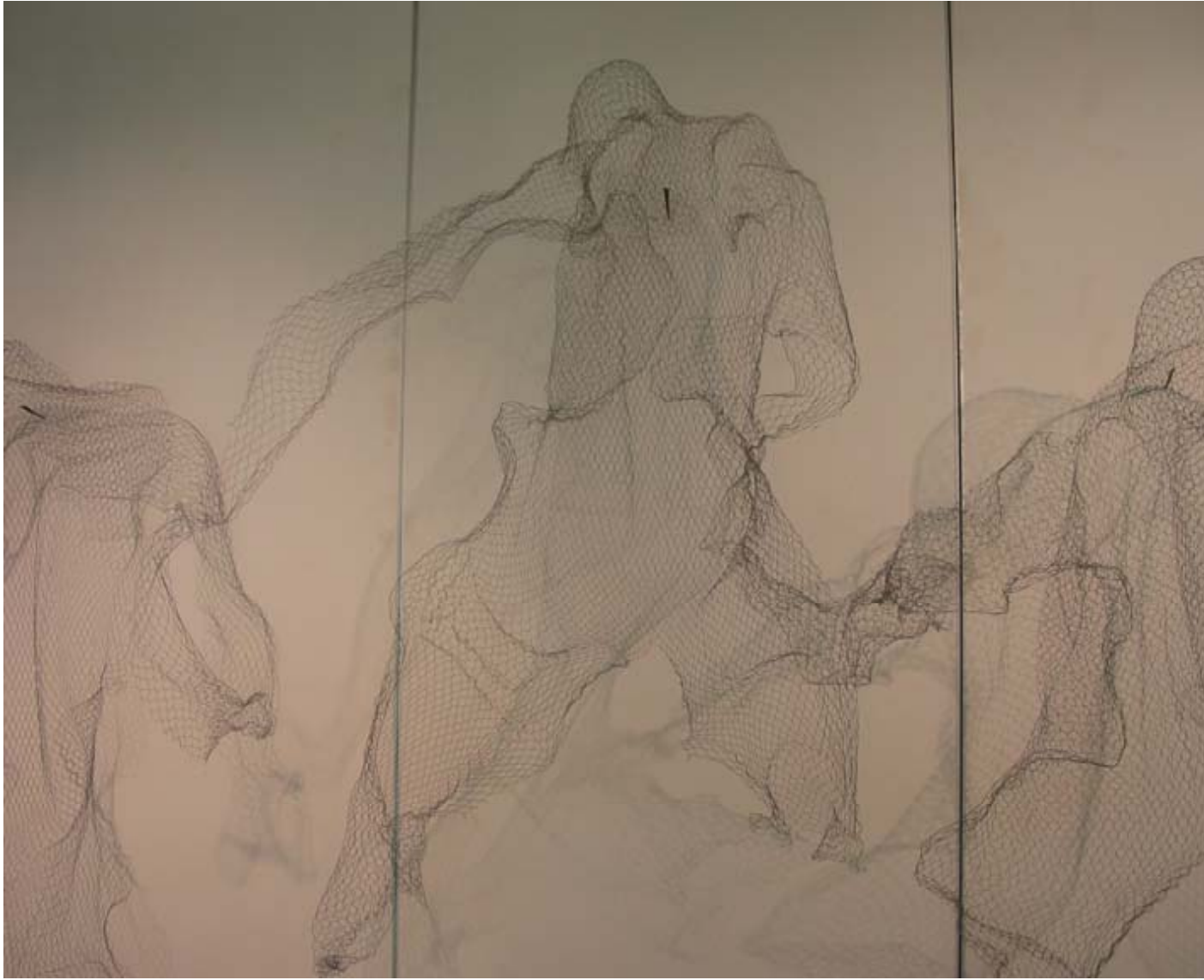


Figure 21 *Detail* 2004



Figure 22 *Limbo* 2004



Figure 24 *Bir günah gibi / Like a sin* 2004



Figure 26 *Inside and outside of the gallery* 2004



Figure 27 *Replikalar / Replikants* 2004



Figure 28 *Installation view*
2004



Figure 29 *Installation view 2004*



Figure 30 *Photographs Lif*



Figure 31 Life Jackets (photographs by Alex Wong) 2004

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