

**VISUAL NOTES:**  
**GEOGRAPHIES I HAVE NOT LIVED IN**

by

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**VISUAL NOTES:**

**GEOGRAPHIES I HAVE NOT LIVED IN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **VISUAL NOTES:**

#### **GEOGRAPHIES I HAVE NOT LIVED IN**

Didem Erbaş Master's Thesis, September 2017

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Erdağ Aksel

**Keywords:** Found objects, Geography, Visual note,

Personal Memory/Narrative, Process

This text supports the exhibition, “Geographies I Have Not Lived in” and it is not to be considered as a text on its own without the exhibition. “Geographies I Have Not Lived in” is a text based on the artistic production process through the things seen and experienced. The issues and questions that helped me frame the text are: Momentary events, the socio-political conditions of Turkey, the time passed commuting every day to university, observations at these times, things collected—whether they can become materials for art? What kind of a process would this constitute? I intend to look at the impact of this method, observe this process and analyze the studio as a site of accumulation. While examining the works that constitute the exhibition, “Geographies I Have Not Lived in”, I aim to produce a sphere that each reader can relate to through their personal history.



## ÖZET

GÖRSEL NOTLAR:

YAŞAMADIĞIM COĞRAFYALAR

Didem Erbaş Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Eylül 2017

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Erdağ Aksel

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Buluntu Objeler, Coğrafya, Görsel Not,

Kişisel Hafıza/ Hikaye, Süreç

Bu metin, “Yaşamadığım Coğrafyalar” sergisini destekleyen bir çalışmadır ve sergiden ayrı olarak değerlendirilemez. “Yaşamadığım Coğrafyalar” gördüklerim ve deneyimlediklerim üzerinden bir sanatsal üretim süreci metni olarak tasarlandı. Şu sorulardan hareketle bu metni oluşturmayı amaçladım. Yaşadığımız coğrafyada (Türkiye’de), yaşanan anlık olaylar, sosyo-politik durumlar, yolda geçen zamanlar, bu zamanlar süresinde görülenler ve toplananlar sanat malzemesi olabilir mi? Bu süreç nasıl bir süreçtir? Yöntem ve gözlemlerin bu sürece sağladığı etki üzerinden, benim için biriktirme alanı olan atölyenin sanatsal üretim üzerine etkisini sorgulamayı amaçlayacağım. “Yaşamadığım Coğrafyalar” başlıklı sergimi meydana getiren işleri analiz etmeye çalışırken, kişinin kendi kişisel geçmişiyle bağ kurabileceği bir alan yaratmayı amaçlıyorum.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this text, I am going to attempt to analyze my process of painting, which I see as the beginning point for my creative method. By discussing the different types of materials that I use in conjunction with and through painting, I will look at how these different elements work together to make up the forms that I arrive at. The challenging nature of this process of analysis has enabled me to confront the workings of my methods. My main goal has thus become recording, writing down the steps of this process and this text has moved forward on the trajectory set by this problem.

Momentary events, the socio-political conditions of Turkey, the time passed commuting every day to university, observations at this time, things collected—could they all become materials for art? What kind of a process would this constitute? How would the field of collecting outside of the studio and the process of making in the studio relate to each other?

The spaces that one inhabits are spaces of living, spaces that are visited or that one has traveled to. Photographs taken on morning and evening walks, collected objects, found objects (visual notes) draw the general framework of the exhibition *Geographies I have Not Lived In*.

The visual notes eventually accumulate in the studio and go into the works without overthinking their individual meanings, undergoing a process of transformation in an idiosyncratic manner. In this process, the material sometimes remains as is and is sometimes physically transformed through my intervention.

The first section of this text is dedicated to the notion of visual notes, discussing the components of these visual notes and the process of working on them and through out them. To characterize these visual notes, the relationship of these notes within art works might be approached in three categories: photography, found objects, and found items in nature. The discussion of how these visual notes are brought together and how they constitute a work will be further dissected. In the last section, a discussion of the artistic production process will take place by looking at geographies that I don't live in, where I couldn't be, discussing their impact on my artistic practice through tracing their presence in my daily life.

## SECTION 1

### WORKING WITH VISUAL NOTES

Visual note implies the visual material gathered during the course of an excursion. This may be a photograph, a sketch drawn in the sketchbook, a tree branch found on the tracks, a tin can, a demonstration manifesto or any other object stumbled upon while walking through any given space. All these visuals and objects are preserved in the studio without a specific, pre-designated purpose. These materials occupy a relatively random yet important space in the studio and possibly inadvertently become a part of the subject matter being worked on.

#### 1.1. Using Photography as a Material for Visual Notes and its Relationship to Paintings

“The idea of painting over photographic images has been present since the invention of photography. Sources regarding materials and techniques appropriate to this process are varied. Some information has appeared in scientific and photographic publications. Communication with a number of contemporary artists, though, has shown that such literature rarely directly influenced their work.”<sup>1</sup>

The idea of employing photography as a supporting element is a technique that has long been recognized and applied by painters; painters often looked at photographs to paint from, instead of painting *en plein air*<sup>2</sup> or using live models.

David Hockney discussed this issue in an interview<sup>3</sup> as well as in his book, *Secret Knowledge*.<sup>4</sup> While examining this process, I intend to discuss how photography contributes to painting as a material. Gilles Deleuze’s text on Francis Bacon’s paintings, *The Logic of Sensation*, and specifically the section on The Painting Before Painting will provide a framework for the analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Gayer, Painting on a Photographic Substrate: Notes Regarding Materials and Techniques over the past 100 years

<sup>2</sup> En plein air is the act of painting outdoors.

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.0wikipedia.org/index.php?q=aHR0cHM6Ly9lbi53aWtpcGVkaWEub3JnL3dpa2kvRW5fcGxlaW5fYWly>

<sup>4</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, Lives of Artists, 2015

<sup>5</sup> David Hockney, Secret Knowledge



Gilles Deleuze, in the section entitled “The Painting Before Painting” from his book “Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation”<sup>5</sup> argues that it would be misleading to presuppose that the painter is confronting a white surface when looking at a blank canvas. He states that there are numerous objects and thoughts occupying a painter’s studio and mind; therefore, prior to getting started on the painting process, these thoughts and objects act as visual or actual images and fill out the canvas. The painter’s job is to empty the canvas rather than filling it up. In this sense, the purpose of the painter is not to recreate on the canvas an object that serves as a model, but to produce a canvas that reverses the model and copy relationship by means of painting on pre-existing images. At this point a crucial experience emerges for the painter: cliché. Clichés encompass this entire category of things, namely, before the painter begins to paint, the clichés have long spread over the canvas.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 1, Francis Bacon's Studio, Working Materials*

Francis Bacon also regarded the photograph as one of his main materials and mentions the influence of the accident on painting. In his book “The Logic of Sensation”, Deleuze points out that Bacon had a profound admiration for photography; he surrounded his studio with photographs and drew portraits based on the photographs of the model along with incorporating other photographs into the process. He felt both an extraordinary commitment and a reckless abandon towards photography. In consideration of his paradoxical perspective

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation, 2003

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.86.

on photography, he employed the photograph as a tool and painted these photographs by attaching to them what Deleuze refers to as “the accidental”, namely, manual marks. Working from the basis of a photograph is of no importance for Bacon since the crucial factor from his standpoint is accidental manual marks he ascribes to these photographs. Manual marks are a painter’s handmade accents. Hence, for Bacon, they are manipulated accidents.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 2, Left: Image from ‘Atlas- Manuel des maladies de la bouche,’ “first edition 1894. Right: Three Studies for Figures at the Crucifixion, central panel detail, Francis Bacon, 1944.<sup>8</sup>

When asked, whether it is possible for a person who doesn’t paint to be able to make the same markings on the painting. Bacon said that while it should theoretically be possible, it somehow isn’t. He said that an average person doesn’t know how to manipulate accidents.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, it is difficult to achieve awareness without manipulating the *accidental*. That is to say, according to Bacon there’s a distinction between a drawing done by a random person and that of a person who *knows*. While Bacon claims both sides can draw and apply manual marks, he underlines the distinction between manipulated accident and un-manipulated

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.p.95.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.theartstory.org/blog/tag/francis-bacon/>

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation, 2003.p.95.

accident. Gilles Deleuze summarizes Bacon's stance as follows: Bacon's reckless abandon is about the painter himself entering into the canvas before beginning to paint. The canvas is already so crammed that the painter has no choice but to enter the canvas. In this way, he can also enter into the cliché and the probability. He enters into the painting because he has a clear idea of what he wants to do but what saves him is the fact that he doesn't know how to get there, how to do what he wants to do. He repeats that the challenge for the painter is not entering the canvas but stepping out of it, which, in return, will allow him to step out of the cliché and probability. For Bacon, stepping out of the cliché and probability while adding random manual marks is a matter of chance, which resembles playing a game of roulette. He may succeed or fail at achieving his objective.<sup>10</sup>

Francis Bacon undertakes this risk and knows how to execute these methods consciously. Ultimately, utilizing photography for Bacon amounts to looking, seeing, eliminating and adding.<sup>11</sup>

In my practice, there is an accumulation of thoughts in my mind, which are then combined with the physical working materials in my studio (photographs, sketches, objects etc.), propelling the artistic working progress through these tangible materials and notes.



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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.p.94-95

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

*Figure 3, Left: Still from Battleship Potemkin, directed by S.M. Eisenstein. Right: Study for the Nurse (detail), Francis Bacon<sup>12</sup>*



*Figure 4, Francis Bacon, at his Studio*

Ron Burnett, in his book *How Images Think*<sup>13</sup>, considers a photograph he took of a specific moment in time through the experience of the Holocaust and how he read on the subject. But, he also notes that when he took this photograph, he was not thinking about all of this; he was not self-conscious. He asks himself whether the moment of the photograph or his interpretation of the photograph is more important, as the process of interpreting a photograph creates a series of vantage points for the photograph. He talks about how these vantage points present events, memories, and histories, appearing in front of his eyes only through the process of interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.theartstory.org/blog/tag/francis-bacon/>

<sup>13</sup> Ron Burnett, *How Images Think*, 2004. p.11-12-13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.17-18-19.





FIGURE 1.3 Smokestack against a night sky (Ron Burnett)

*Figure 5, Smokestack against a night sky by Ron Burnett*

The process of making “Soldier kicks Soldier” involved commenting on the geography of Turkey where military service is mandatory<sup>15</sup>. As a woman who does not have the military service obligation, the photograph was interpreted through the experience of being an outsider to this particular form of community. The faces as the identifying elements of the photograph were covered by black tape to underline the important subject in the photograph, rather than their identities as soldiers. It sufficed to see the uniform that denoted the condition of being a soldier. In this small, anonymous military photo, a soldier jokingly kicks another soldier as they pose for the camera. In the process of transforming the photograph of a moment, the kicking foot was abstracted to the point of being almost completely deformed, thus concealing the violence of this particular pose.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/tarihten-olaylar/278067/turkiyede-zorunlu-askerligin-gecmisi-sadece-100-yil>



*Figure 6, Soldier kicks Soldier, Manipulated Found Photograph with electricity tape and oil on canvas, 2016*

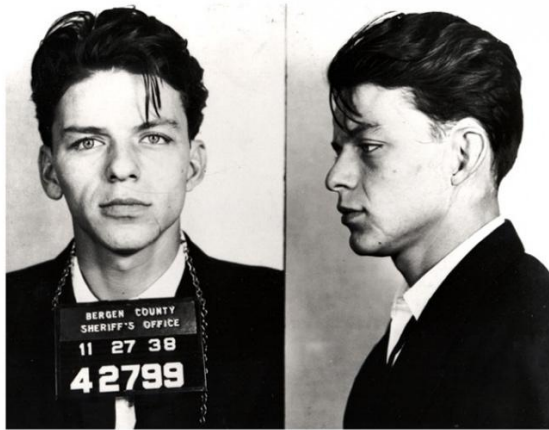
I have realized that in my manner of painting, random gestures, forms of composition and the use of color correspond to the notion of Bacon's markings put forward by Gilles Deleuze. My motivation in transforming the photograph into a visual object and displaying it alongside the painting refers to my willingness to involve the audience in my journey, keeping the originating point of the act of painting.

Another photograph-based work is a mug shot painting from the series entitled “*Guilty Series*”. The mug shot photograph was taken during the singer Frank Sinatra’s arrest in 1938.<sup>16</sup> The series originated from painting the characters in Franz Kafka’s “*In the Penal Colony*”<sup>17</sup> with reference to some mug shot photos taken from various media. The work has taken its final form through various added and removed elements. The technique of blurring the faces to render them anonymous, which I’ve applied in various other paintings, is also visible in this work. In this painting, also made using a photograph, the face in the portrait is blurred with the gray of the background, thus somehow destroying the visage and rendering the person without identity. It is no longer important that the person in the original photograph was Frank Sinatra—the identity of the person is not the most significant aspect of the work

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/mugshots/celebrity/music/frank-sinatra>

<sup>17</sup> Franz Kafka, *In the Penal Colony*, 1914, revised 1918

and is not a part of the final work, thus allowing the work to play on notions and traditions of portrait painting.



*Figure7, Left: Frank Sinatra, mug shot from Google search, 1938. Right: Guilty Series, Oil on Canvas, 2015*

Another work inspired by Franz Kafka's *"In the Penal Colony"* is *"State Men."* The found photograph is wrapped with a thin wire; the face of the portrait is burned with the help of a candle and heedlessly nailed to a wall. Following this interference to the photograph, the same photograph is painted in a monochrome color and both are displayed on the same wall. While a hole has been created in the face section of the photograph by candlelight, the face section of the painting on the right is concealed using paint, leaving only the official badge on the hat and the white necktie. The anonymization (the act of painting or not painting certain parts) applied to the faces also re-occurs in hats and ties that represent the soldier. Since these parts of the soldiers' uniforms denote rank and identity, stripping the final painting of these markings of the individual within the hierarchy of the army is an important gesture in the process of the work: looking at forms of hierarchy through the prism of ambiguity in their relationships to violence.



*Figure 8, Left: States Men, Found Photograph Covered by Wire. Right: States Men, Oil on Canvas, 2015*

The Girl in Pink Dress was inspired by a video that went viral on social media. Three screenshots were taken from the video. In the video, children were forced to take off their clothes one by one following the commands from what appeared to be the police loudspeaker. They were later ordered to put their clothes back on when the police approved and they were allowed to pass over to other side of the police barriers. We don't see the part of passing through to the other side in the video, but we do hear the commands. We don't know what has happened after the children cross over to the other side of the barriers. We can only imagine how the event unfolded. I wanted to further imagine other parts of this unseen yet common story through the barricades between the police and what they consider their "rivals". A concrete object inhibits the moment that we cannot see or know enough about.

The disappearance of the girl in pink in the video is directly linked to the abstracted use of pink in the process of painting. In the first painting of the series, while the girl in pink dress is somewhat clearly visible, the second and third paintings include pink as abstract stains. The



series includes a total of five paintings of various sizes, lined up from the largest to the smallest in parallel to the increasing abstraction of the pink dress to the point of disappearing.



*Figure 9, Anonymous video, video screenshots, 2017*



*Figure 10, The Girl with Pink Dress, 6 Pieces, Oil on canvases, 2017*

Common threads among the photographs that I have accumulated over the years and which have made their ways to my studio are childhood and military service. The photographs that I bought from thrift shops are gathered without any categorization. Later, during the process of

painting, there is a selection process, which is shaped by my personal choice and the subjects that influence me at the time of the painting. In addition to photographs, a cinematographic visual image or the theme of a book can also be utilized as a material for painting.

Andrei Tarkovsky said that his goal in making *Nostalgia* was a yearning that he felt for Russia as he made the film in Italy. The cinematography of the film is very dark, pointing to the director's pain in being separated from his family and he speaks of this connection to his past as being the illness of nostalgia.<sup>18</sup>

The departure point for the paintings *Abandoned Zone I-II-III (Tarkovsky's Children)* is Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*. Both of the scenes that are reworked in the painting are from the dream sequences of the film. The scene begins with a door opening and in the first shot are a child and a dog. When the door is fully open, a girl emerges from the inside wearing a coat and looking at the camera (at the viewers, at us). She walks towards the child and the dog and the three of them continue to stare at the camera. A bit later, a woman who could be their mother, judging from her age, comes out. With a coat in one hand, she takes her place next to the other three and they continue to look back at us. When all of them have been placed on the stage, they look around and, at that moment, we only see a dog and a horse on the screen. Later, accompanied by music, the camera shows each and every one of them, slowly and up close, and moves on to a hilly field with a house, placed behind the figures. Another woman comes onto the stage and all of the figures (except for the animals) look back at the house. This dream sequence ends with sounds of ships and water. All of these things take place within three minutes.<sup>19</sup>

The two paintings based on the film (*Tarkovsky's Children I-II*) use a predominantly green palette—the original images are in black and white and many of the figures have been erased. Both paintings include a young girl in white in the middle of the compositions.

The work *Abandoned Zone III* was made after *Tarkovsky's Children*, thinking about my own childhood, based on a found photograph. By placing a house in the background, just like what

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<sup>18</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 1985. p.202.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r61RgWbFHvc>

Tarkovsky did in *Nostalghia*, I tried to express the longing and nostalgia I felt for my own childhood. With what could be called the urban redevelopment, the playing areas for children are shrinking drastically in Istanbul; the sidewalks are included in the construction sites, further alienating individuals. I link the yearning that Tarkovsky felt for his own geography and his homeland with the longing I feel for the past of Istanbul, the Istanbul I grew up in. The city that exists in our imagination, in our past, is rapidly changing every day. Surrounded by new constructions, the city becomes a tightly knit wall of concrete, physically and metaphorically pushing me to think about the boundaries of our perception. The lonely girls in the middle of these paintings thus denote a moment in the past that will not be experienced again, symbols of a yearning.



*Figure 11, Andrei Tarkovsky, Dream Sequence Opening Scene, Nostalgia, 1983*



*Figure 12, Abandoned Zone I (Tarkovsky's Children), Oil on Panel, 2014*



*Figure 13, Andrei Tarkovsky, Dream Sequence Final Scene, Nostalgia, 1983*



*Figure 14, Abandoned Zone II (Tarkovsky's Children), Oil on Canvas, 2014*





*Figure 15, Abandoned Zone III (My Childhood), Oil on Press Canvas, 2014*

In conclusion, one can refer to their personal history and their memory without being aware of it in the process of making art. The awareness of this seeping makes possible a reinterpretation of the work after the process of creation. This interpretation allows for the person to rethink their process. I realized that this reading of the work, for me, was only possible after I started to write about the works. I'm uncertain as to how much of these yearnings and personal references I was aware of while I was making the paintings.

## **1.2. Collected *Objects* as Visual Notes**

The emotion that Tarkovsky defined as the illness of nostalgia<sup>20</sup>, which he describes as a connection to the past, helped me question and thus define my process of collecting things that used to belong to other people. According to Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is a yearning for a home that longer exists or a home that never existed, combining the words “return home” (-nostos) and “longing” (algia). As nostalgia is based on a feeling of loss and changing places, it is also linked to a person's love relationship with their own fantasy.<sup>21</sup>

As I don't have too many photographs of my childhood, the overwhelming number of baby figures in the objects that I collected evoked me to think that this “lack” in my own childhood could be the root of this process. As Svetlana Boym has written, things that I felt were missing from my childhood (photographs and objects) and the longing I felt for the past (the home that no longer exists) converged in my desire to collect and anchor this desire in nostalgia.

None of the collected objects were selected with the goal of making them art objects. Hiroshi Sugimoto speaks of the artists' collecting:

“Artists collect for the same basic reasons as everyone else -- possession, obsession -- but often with a quirkier visual or intellectual hinterland. ‘My collection is my mentor,’ ‘It trained my taste and sensitivity.’ (Wallschlager, 2015) dipnot: The Artist as Collector at the Barbican, Wullschlager, Jackie. FT.com; London, 2015)

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<sup>20</sup> Sculpting in Time, 1985, p.206.

<sup>21</sup> Svetlana Boym, *Nostaljinin Geleceği*, 2001, p.14.



*Figure 16, Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector, Martin Wong and Danh Vo's collection. Photograph by Peter McDiarmid (detail)*



*Figure 17, Magnificent Obsessions: The Artist as Collector, Peter Blake's Dolls Collection. Photograph by Peter McDiarmid*



Hiroshi Sugimoto says the artist has a desire to collect just like everybody else; the difference between the artist and somebody else is that the artist's choices have an artistic background.<sup>22</sup> (Wallschlager, 2015)

The choice in objects and things could be related to the specific interests of the artist and they could become a part of their works. Peter Blake speaks about this:

“...there's a series called *Dreams* which are little sculptures and all the elements in those would have been originally part of collections, so this demonstrates the crossover very well.”<sup>23</sup>

Uwe Fleckner also writes about the artist Sarkis's collecting habit. While the collected objects do not constitute a work in the studio by themselves, they instigate journeys and processes that will lead to works and could then become artistic when they are included in the space as such.<sup>24</sup>

Uwe Fleckner further points out that it is possible to trace the shifts in the organization of the objects in Sarkis's studio. Sarkis photographs the objects in his studio and the shifts could be seen clearly in the photographs from different times. The positions of the objects change in the studio and they are often re-grouped.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Artist as Collector at the Barbican, Wallschlager, Jackie. FT.com; London, 2015

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/1088/peter-blake-on-collecting>

<sup>24</sup> Sarkis Külliyyatı Üzerine: Bellek ve Sonsuz, “Portre Olarak Atölye: Caspar David’ten Sarkis’e Çalışma Yerinin Temsili Üzerine”, 2005. p.269.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

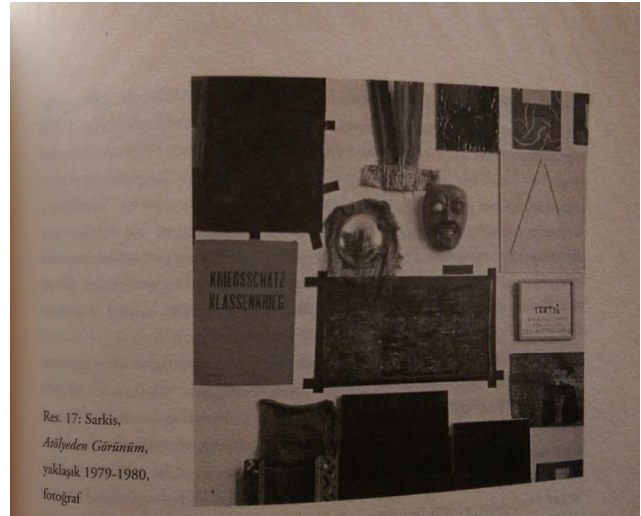
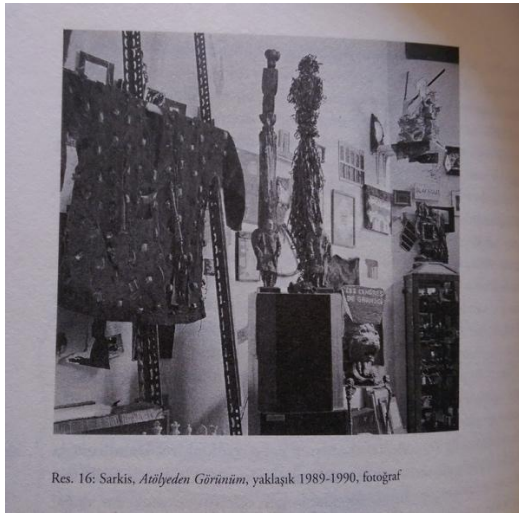


Figure 18, Objects in Sarkis' Studio, left: 1989-1990, right: 1979- 1980, Images from the book *Bellek ve Sonsuz*

According to Uwe Fleckner, Sarkis's conceptual framework for his late works is influenced by Aby Warburg's notion of *Leidschatz* (treasure of pain). Aby Warburg developed this idea in 1928 to correspond to the artwork's being a product and carrier of society overcoming fear and he interpreted this notion as, "people's pain are transformed into their treasure." (Fleckner, 2005)<sup>26</sup>

Uwe Fleckner further states that the artwork is an archive of the experience of pain in the human memory. Thus, Warburg underscores the role of the historian as, "a seismograph that is charged with the responsibility of recording the waves of memory, burdened by passion and emotion." <sup>27</sup>

Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*<sup>28</sup> consists of 79 panels. Each one has a black cloth as a backdrop and includes reproductions of art, advertisements, maps, personal snapshots, and newspaper clippings. Warburg aimed to map art history through images, without any text.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.10-11.

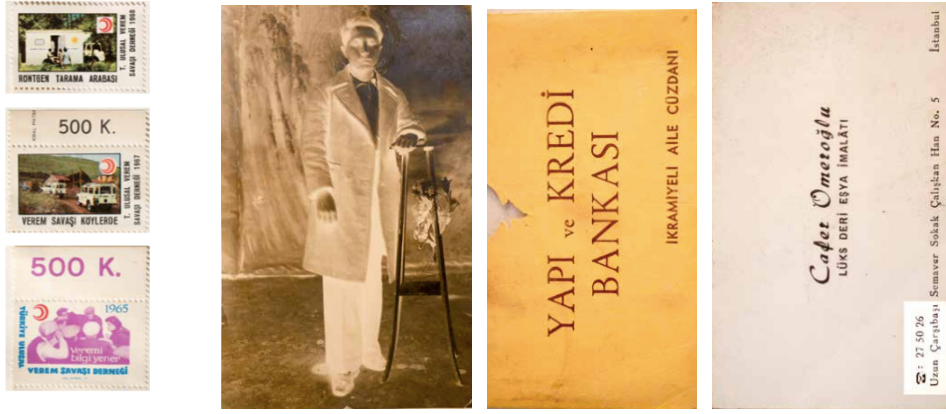
<sup>28</sup> : <http://www.kunstkritikk.no/nyheter/aby-warburg-created-marvellous-theoretical-fictions/>

While this atlas is not an artwork itself, it has paved the way for numerous artistic works that utilize and map images in a similar way.



Figure 19, Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1928





*Figure 20, Collected Objects (baby tolls, glasses, stamps, heraldry, business cards, photographs, box, pins, etc.), View from the Studio, 2017*

Drawings and paintings, together with the collected objects form collages on the walls of my studio or on panels. I then try to engage in a dialogue with the objects, paintings etc. where I can project my memories and all the connotations they bring. This happens spontaneously, intuitively and flows naturally after my initial point of departure. Working Board I and II show this process; they include photographs and drawings with references to my personal history and aspirations, mythological visual elements, a hair ribbon, a small lectern, a soldier toy, Paul Celan's poems, and personal letters. This process of forming and putting together is a map not dissimilar to Mnemosyne Atlas, integrated into my artistic production.

Working with panels enabled me to move beyond the boundaries of the frame and pushed me to make installation-like collages on walls. One of these works is "*The Statesmen, The Telephone, The Black Bag, Galata and Criminals.*" It started on the wall of the studio as a series of objects, documents, and paintings, which were then moved to the exhibition space.







*Figure 23, View from the Studio's Wall, 2017*



*Figure 24, Letter from Istanbul (Group Exhibition's Name), "The Statesmen, The Telephone, The Black Bag, Galata and Criminals", Pi Artworks, London, 2017*

While preparing for the group exhibition *Letter from Istanbul*, I contemplated the trials of many journalists and writers, and about the act of writing letters.<sup>29</sup>

Thinking about whether letters were the only way to communicate for someone who is in prison, I realized that for people who had dedicated their lives to writing and thinking (writers and journalists) their inability to do their jobs was taking away their basic liberties. Motivated by these personal feelings, I wanted to delve into this topic.

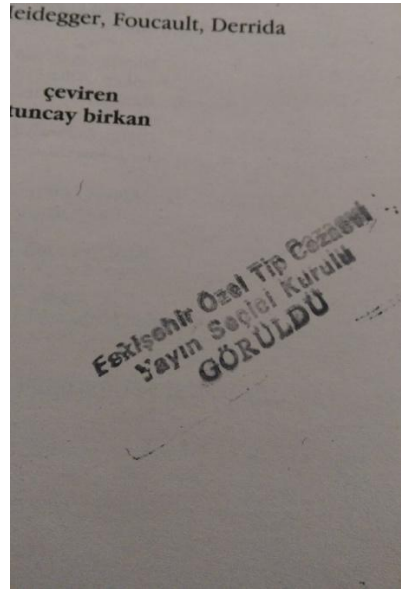
Objects that were controlled were stamped with as “seen” and allowed in, books for reading were not even allowed into the prisons. Thinking about these controls and surveillance, I created a stencil for the wall that was inspired by the “seen” stamp, to be applied to the wall on which I collated objects and paintings.<sup>30</sup>

Envelopes and letters were also juxtaposed with three paintings from the Guilty series. A telephone with its cable cut off was placed as part of this collage to point to the lack of communication. An old postcard of Galata symbolized a yearning for the past and a white sheet from my mother’s dowry signified memory. I imagined all of these objects to have emerged from my imaginary personal trunk, a place that was my own. A black bag and a found letter were also placed as part of this constellation. In addition, a letter was hung on the wall of the installation, asking for the viewers in London to write to me. The letter would thus serve as a communication tool that would facilitate my receiving letters from people I didn’t know.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/02/free-turkey-media/> , <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/turkey-list-of-journalists-detained-charged-before-and-after-coup-attempt/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/ayse-arman/asli-erdoganin-cezaevindeki-136-gunu-40329758>



*Figure 25, Second hand book, stamped with “seen” in a prison, 2017*



*Figure 26, Letter from Istanbul, "The Statesmen, The Telephone, The Black Bag, Galata and Criminals", Pi Artworks, London, 2017*



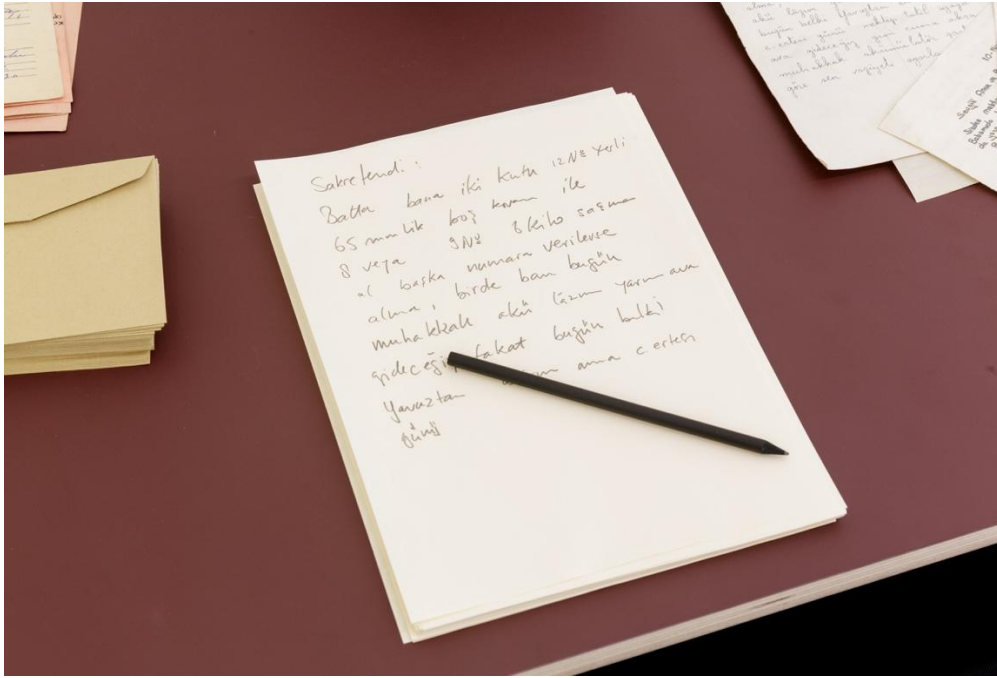


Figure 27, Letter from London on the table, detail, 2017



Figure 28, Found Envelops and free envelopes on the table, detail, 2017

### 1.3. *Collected Items in Nature as Visual Notes*

The exhibition *Geographies That I have Not Lived in* includes works from this section. I spent and worked a long time in the resort town Silivri, near Istanbul. I researched the life there, familiarizing myself with the town's visual language and culture. Some of this information I collated in visual notes that gathered from that immediate environment as well as from the local nature.

German Neo-expressionist painter Anselm Kiefer used objects he found in nature as part of his paintings, thus referring both to his personal past and to recent German history. The materials of straw, ash, and blood that he uses in his paintings are references to war, destruction, and genocide.<sup>31</sup>

“In most of his works, Kiefer employed lead, in its solid form or dropped after melting, alone or in combination with other materials. The artist has also made particular use of photographs, vegetable items (e.g., straw, dried plants or flowers, and burnt wood), ash, sand, volcanic earths, and iron wire. He has used materials picked up from the land around his studio or collected from around the world. He created an archive of plants and flowers from which restorers have to draw in case they have to replace components in his works. However, he is not concerned about the aging of his artworks because he intends them as dynamic objects aimed to inspire different feelings and interpretations in future viewers.”<sup>32</sup>

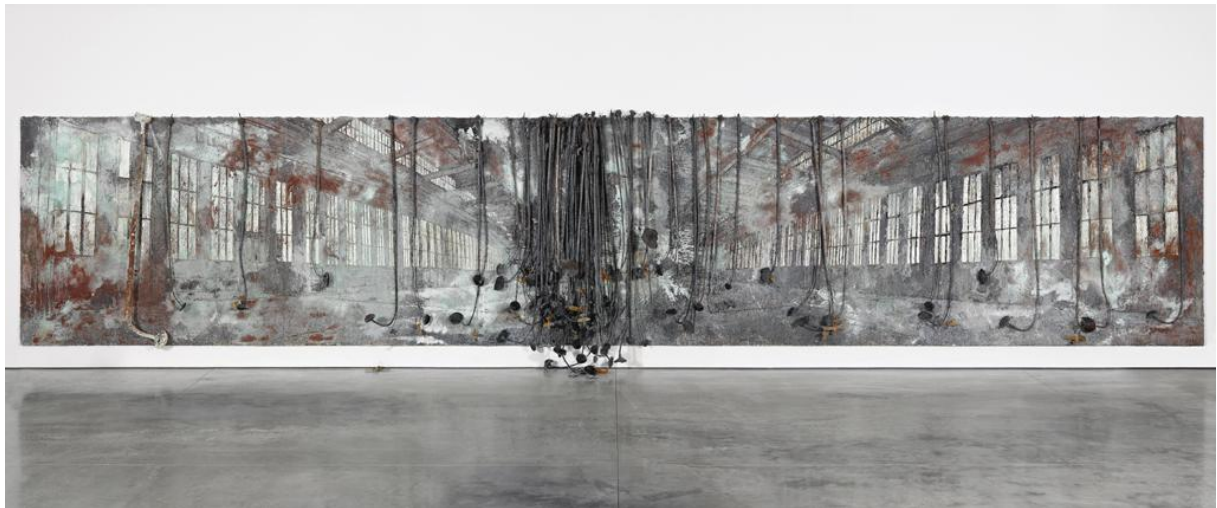
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<sup>31</sup> Ahu Antmen, 20. Yüzyıl Batı Sanatında Akımlar, 2008, p.266.

<sup>32</sup> Anselm Kiefer: a study of his materials, 2015



*Figure 29, View from Anselm Kiefer's Studio, La Ribaute, Barjac, France*



*Figure 30, Anselm Kiefer, at rosa miel apibus, Oil, acrylic, terrracotta, salt, lead and resin on canvas, 2010-11, Photograph: Ben Westoby Courtesy White Cube*

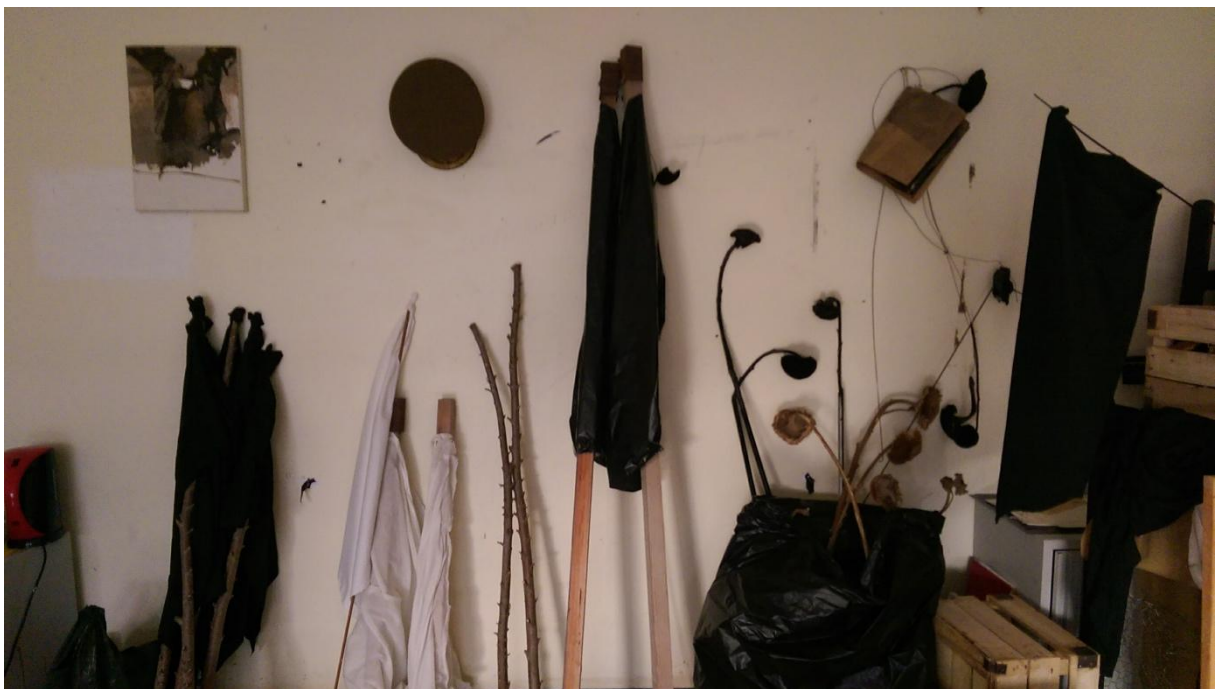
Just like the materials that Anselm Kiefer collected from around his studio, my long walks in Silivri presented me numerous tree branches, sunflowers, stones, and leaves that were added to the paintings and some of those objects also became works on their own.

One of the works that stemmed from this act of collecting is the Flags series, which were constructed using pine branches that were found during a walk. The branches were taken to the studio and transformed into flagpoles using pieces of black cloth as flags. The first visual note that triggered this work is the image of landowners in Silivri, who mark their ownership

using cloth tied to sticks. It is obviously a gesture of marking their territory but also a way of remembering where their land began and where it ended.



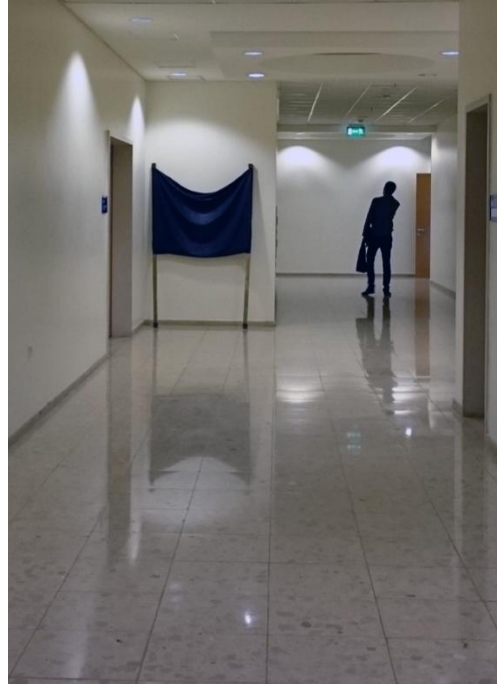
*Figure 31, Photographs by me, Pine Wood Sticks in Silivri Seymen district, 2017*



*Figure 32, View from the Studio, Collected Items in Nature, 2017*



The pine wood sticks that I brought to my studio formed the visual foundation of the work. The image and the idea that I wanted to create were of people carrying white flags on the streets to denote peace.<sup>33</sup> This visual inspiration later became five black flags, which then became the subjects of paintings.



*Figure 33, Black Flags and Black Banner, 2016-2017*

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<sup>33</sup> [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/foto/foto\\_galeri/457904/2/Cizre\\_de\\_beyaz\\_bayrak\\_li\\_kacis\\_devam\\_ediyor.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/foto/foto_galeri/457904/2/Cizre_de_beyaz_bayrak_li_kacis_devam_ediyor.html)



Figure 34, *Interior Paintings, Oil on Canvas, 2017*

I used black flag and black flag and banner images in paintings of dark *pessimistic* interiors. By installing the real flags and banners together with the paintings, I aim to challenge the conventional method of exhibiting a painting. Illusion of space and illusion of objects are combined with the real space and the real objects manifest the final installation.

Another element from my visual notes was the work *Barriers*. The artwork with the name of “*Barriers*” is an installation that includes paintings and three-dimensional objects.

Barriers are universal phenomena in this age of security that we live in. Nevertheless, when one lives in Turkey, the encounters with security barriers of police and military are somehow more frequent. They are almost a familiar part of our *everyday life* because of security but also because of architectural gentrification. We are so accustomed to these sights of barriers, most of the time we hardly ever see them.

*The work Barriers* is 120x160x50 cm. It is constructed from a wood skeleton and canvas. In the image, the barrier that is placed in between the doors will be placed between the paintings in the exhibition space, letting through/not letting through the passage between three-dimensional works and painting. This passage will allow for the state of thinking intuitively,

serendipitously, just like the way in which painters think while working on canvas. The desire to go beyond painting on canvas and to work with objects pushes me towards working three-dimensionally in my artistic practice.

Throughout my artistic practice, I have been trying to make associations between my paintings and the objects I made or I found. Rather than using solely the two dimensional surface of the paintings, I tried to activate the three dimensional space using the sculptural qualities of certain objects, together with the potential memory objects may carry. I made spatial arrangements with the “association-triggering-objects” in relation to the subject matters of my paintings; I tend to use these objects like geographical and cultural artifacts.<sup>34</sup>



*Figure 35, Photograph taken by Didem Erbaş in Karaköy, İstanbul, July 2017*

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<sup>34</sup> Anna Oppermann, Zapping the Archives: Hypermedia and Anna Oppermann’s “Embraces” Ensemble, Steve Dietz, 1998-1999





*Figure 36, Photograph taken by Didem Erbaş in Silivri, May 2017*



*Figure 37, Photograph taken by Didem Erbaş in Ankara, June 2017*





*Figure 38, Photograph taken by Didem Erbaş in Diyarbakır, Sur, June 2017*



*Figure 39, Wood Construction Phase, Sabanci University, 2017*



*Figure 40, View from the Studio, Paintings, 2017*



*Figure 41, Barriers, wood and canvas, 2017*

## SECTION 2

### THE FUNCTION OF THE STUDIO AS A SITE OF COLLECTING

In his article, *Open the Box* James Putnam speaks about the cabinet of curiosities.<sup>35</sup> Cabinet of Curiosities (*Wunderkammer*) was first used in Europe between the 16th and 18th centuries to keep non-artistic objects, including fossils, objects related to animals, plants and other natural phenomena, special mirrors and lenses. The main principle of Cabinet of Curiosities was diversity. In this article, James Putnam speaks about artists who were inspired by the cabinet of curiosities and how this process impacted their practices. He divides these artistic practices into two groups: the first is artists who take on the role of the collector, using assemblage of three-dimensional objects. The second is a sensibility of discovering the parameters of natural and artificial objects through image manipulation and transformation; he uses “Surrealists” as an example of this second tendency. (Putnam, 2011)<sup>36</sup>

James Putnam shows that cabinets of curiosities function similarly for Dadaists and surrealists in the 20th century. Surrealists would bring together many different objects and would take the cabinet of curiosity to a new level. One of these surrealist artists was Andre Breton, who included mummified animals, shells, bones, stones, and mirrors to multiply the images within the cabinet.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Art and Artifacts, Introduction: *Open the Box*, 2001

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 42, Andre Breton, Poem Object, Collage of Objects (and inscribed poem) on card on wood, 1935*

Joseph Cornell's poetic and monumental assemblages in which he brings together used and found objects create his very own micro cosmos. (In 1932, the first versions used glass cases traditionally used for displaying taxidermic birds; in 1940s-1950s, small shadow boxes with glass vitrines were used.) He mentions that after Cornell, other surrealists took the process to new levels, bringing various objects together in unconventional combinations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.





*Figure 43, Joseph Cornell, Various Boxes*

According to James Putnam, many artists used the principle of collecting in cabinets of curiosities to collect for their own artistic goals. These collections could be eclectic and personal, with often strong connections to memory and imagination, focusing on accumulation rather than an organized manner of selection. The artist's motivation behind collecting and preserving is the same as for everyone else, the primary difference being the artist's studio as a site of accumulating.<sup>39</sup> (Putnam, 2001)

Daniel Buren highlights the studio as a site for collecting and preserving objects. It is the steady place in which moveable objects are created. The studio is where the work is born and it is a personal space. As a private and personal space, it is a place of experimentation where the artist has the opportunity to make judgments. In the studio, the judgment belongs solely to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

the artist since only the products the artists deems suitable step outside the studio.<sup>40</sup>  
(Buren,1970-71)

In his essay entitled: “The Function of the Studio”, Daniel Buren draws a distinction between American and European studios and discloses their distinguishing physical features. He emphasizes that, under the influence of 19th century Paris studios, European studios are spacious and have high ceiling while the more recently emerged American studios are not built in accordance with any particular pattern. At the end of his essay, Buren indicates that the origins of his production stems from the eradication of the studio.<sup>41</sup>

In his interview with Beral Madra, Buren states that he doesn’t have a studio because he builds his works in the space that they are going to be installed in. (He defines himself as a site-artist) Therefore, in order to both get inspiration and materialize the work, he prefers to go to the designated space. In other words, he underlines that it’s impossible for him to create a work without familiarizing himself with the space it is going to be displayed in, thus, the studio is redundant.<sup>42</sup>

Referring to Buren’s “The Function of the Studio”, Caitlin Jones, in her essay<sup>43</sup>: “*When the Studio is a Laptop*” coins the terms “post studio” and “laptop studio”. She defines the “Post Studio” term that is used for the artists who work with digital forms and online surroundings and she ends her paragraph with this question:

“What happens when the studio in question is simply a laptop in the artist’s kitchen or the local coffee shop?”<sup>44</sup>

With regards to Caitlin Jones and Buren’s writings on the subject of “*The Function of the Studio*”, it could be concluded that artists create their own working spaces and in today’s conditions these spaces don’t necessarily have to be physical. It may be a living room, the entrance of a store, any given space of any size or merely a laptop.

Studio is a place where visual notes are collected. In this sense, the studio could be seen as an area of experimentation where all materials are seeped through a filter.

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<sup>40</sup> Daniel Buren, The function of the Studio, 1971

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Beral Madra, İki Yılda Bir Sanat/Bienal Yazıları, 2003, Nisan 1989, Arredamento Dekorasyon Dergi

<sup>43</sup> Caitlin Jones, “When the Studio is a Laptop”, 2017

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



In my opinion, the studio is a space of experiment where the personal accumulates. Hence, in my case the need for the physical space persists. Any physical space that allows me to gather, collect and store qualifies as a studio. This space is similar to the streets I spend my days on or a notebook in which I write, take notes or draw. It's a part of my daily life; therefore, I live alongside with the things in this space, which consist of collected objects, photographs, sketches and all materials that exist for the sake of creation.

## CONCLUSION

My goal in writing this text was to research the impact of the daily ministrations on my artistic practice and to relay the ways in which quotidian events seep into my painterly works, allowing for intuitive and serendipitous crossings. This method of research has created a framework of the works, contributing to the process of making. I intentionally didn't try to create connections between all my works. The starting point for each is different and they all host different temporalities. Through this text, I saw that the connection between the works is not visual or methodological, but rather the processes of accumulation that I integrate into my daily life.

Propelled by this text, I aim to further research the methods of these daily accumulations, fortifying the conceptual framework of my works. Having recently been introduced to Aby Warburg's organizational principles in his Mnemosyne Atlas, I will further think about the ways in which objects and images come together in my studio, to shape and to focus my artistic language, foregrounding exhibition and publication practices in collaboration with like-minded peers.

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