

Interview

Arts “on Facebook”

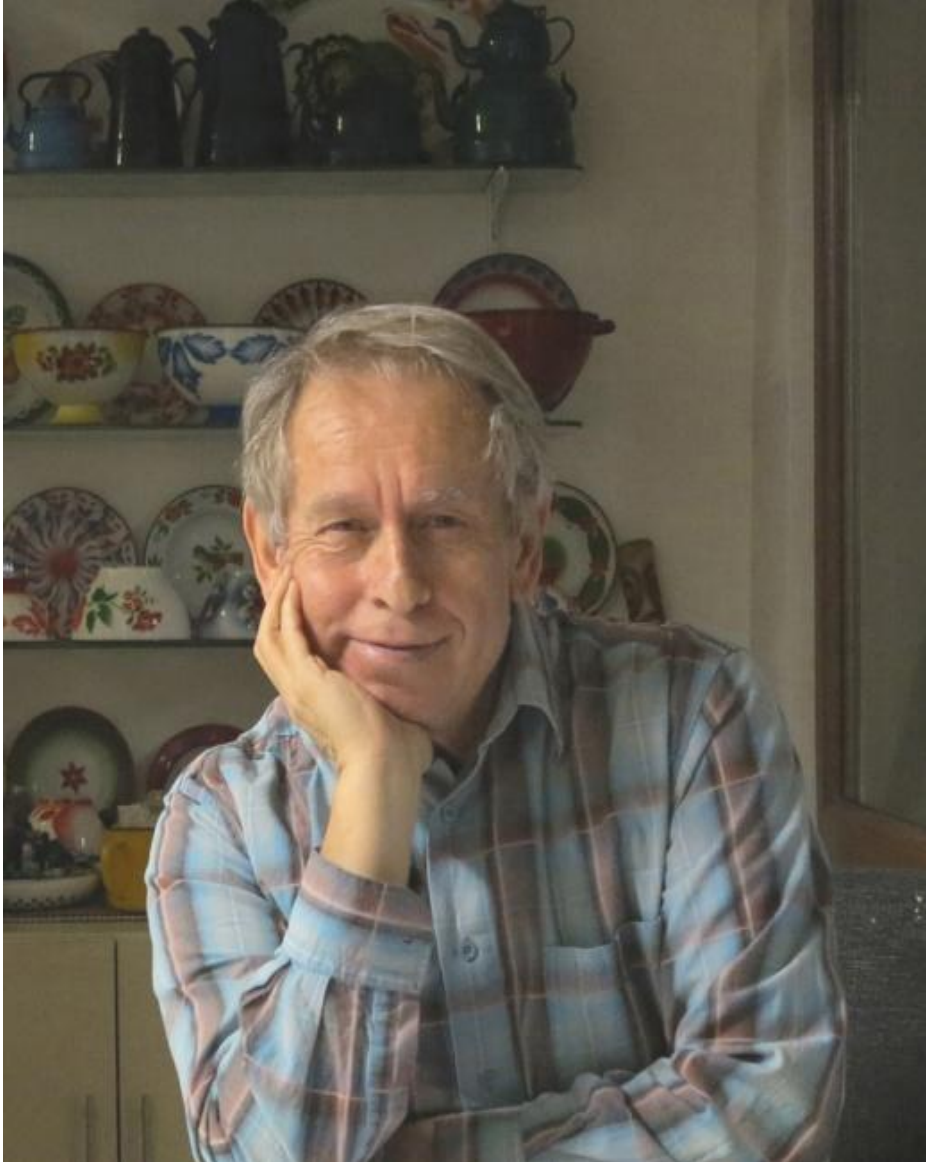
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Interview with Asst. Prof. Dr. Gurbüz Dođan Ekşiođlu



INTRODUCTION

Gürbüz Doğan Ekşioğlu is an internationally renowned Turkish caricature and graphic artist who was born in Mesudiye (Ordu) in 1954. His professional education was at the Marmara University Faculty of Fine Arts, Istanbul and today he is an Assistant Professor at the Yeditepe University Faculty of Fine Arts, Graphic Design Department.

Dr. Ekşioğlu has been drawing caricatures since 1977 and has won twenty-seven international prizes and forty-four national awards. His national and international exhibitions number between 150 and 200 with over twenty solo displays including one in New York and nine personal digital outputs.

Gürbüz Doğan Ekşioğlu received the Sedat Simavi Plastic Arts award in 1997 and his work had been published, six times, as the cover for The New Yorker Magazine and once with the Forbes.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/99mar/gilgul.htm>

In addition to both the New York Times newspaper and The Atlantic Monthly Magazine publishing his work, he has been extensively published in the USA, Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, Italy, Switzerland, Iran, Japan, Kosovo, Canada, Pakistan and Greece. Two of his arts printed on the UNICEF postcards are being sold worldwide and he has had a special success with his caricature published in the New Yorker cover for Sept. 11, 2011 anniversary edition.

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/comment/2011/05/cover-story-erasing-osama.html>

<http://www.newyorker.com/search?qt=dismax&sort=score+desc&query=erasing+osama&submit=>



Caddebostan Cultural Centre Gallery

PAS: Kindly introduce your latest exhibition to our readers. What is the title of the collection, and how many pieces of art work are in it? Could you also talk a bit about yourself and how long it has taken you to put the collection together?

GDE: My 2014 exhibition was not something I had planned; I was using the social media, Facebook to present my work. I started sharing my professional art work, at first, and later I began sharing instant drawings, analyses from time to time on current issues, then this became more frequent.

In 2013, I produced 200 pieces of work on current issues. The Caddebostan Cultural Centre (CCC) art gallery manager, Sedef Narçın, proposed to me to make an exhibition, I offered the work that I have been sharing through Facebook; this was accepted, and Kadıköy Municipality collaborated with me to put on the exhibition.

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The best part for me was publishing the 219-page exhibition catalogue that contains 188 of my work. There is no name for the collection in this exhibition. If you ask what I'm collecting, it's 'enamel cap, or enamel', it has been nearly 20 years that I've been collecting enamel. I have a collection of nearly 500 pieces of enamel products dated from the 1800s to the 1960s, which are no longer in production.

PAS: Discuss the concepts underlying your work in general and how they are realised in particular with your 2014 CCC exhibition.

GDE: Seventy percent of the work in the exhibition is related to current times. In recent years, I have been expressing my feelings by my art on events that are on Turkey's agenda. I have made 26 art-works on the Gezi Park events. Sometimes I do fantastic, romantic work. Seasons, love, etc. also form my subjects. In a sense I work from an artist's perspective i.e. from his own internal world to the general outlook and today's Turkey.

PAS: What do you think about the Gezi Park protest, was it an international conspiracy to destabilise the government or is it more of the fragmentation occurring in the Turkish society vis-à-vis (when you compare) Sunnis vs. Alevis or secular crystallisation in that diverse groups are finding ways to challenge the government's alleged religious direction?

GDE: It's not exactly to impotent the government or to challenge the religious orientation. It's the reaction of people together from all groups to the AKP government which has been in power for 11 years and has increased the prohibition, only thinking of the welfare of the 47% of their voters, increasing the application of non-democratic criteria against the other 52% segments.

PAS: Give me a brief background to how you approach your creative methods and their relevance to our discussion of your present exhibition.

GDE: Creativity is a feature that is genetically innate, and it is different in each person. When people's inborn creativity, interests, abilities are noticed and trained accordingly and the person enjoys his profession then he becomes successful. Loving the job I do, enjoying what I do, not just the art, but also the sum areas I am interested in such as poetry, literature, politics, economics, sociology, philosophy, etc. informed my production.

PAS: Does the history of Arts, especially avant-garde art inform on the process of your becoming a successful and well established artist? How and where does your formative process begin?

GDE: Since I've been in the arts for almost 40 years my desire has shifted from being an artist to graphic education and has resulted in my merging painting and graphics to communicate visually and to creating new synthesis. I also have production related to contemporary art, I follow contemporary art, and I have interest in photography which is why my analyses don't just have pictorial materials, but also three-dimensional and photo-assisted formations.

PAS: Which of the well-established and less known artists have influenced your creativity? Kindly discuss the similarities, differences and any recurrent themes you share with at least two contemporary artists whose work you are very familiar with as objectively as you can with the view to help us understand the active rationale for your work. In other words, how does your art communicate when compared to that of any of your contemporaries?

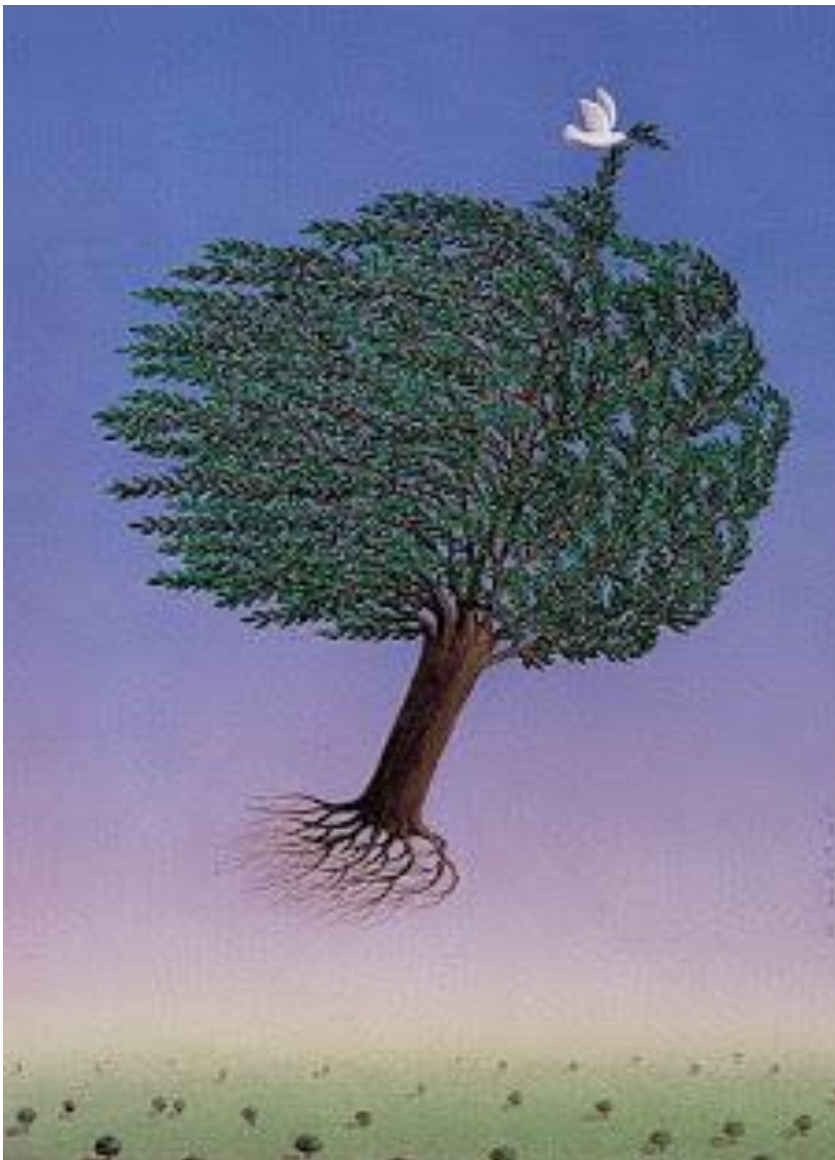
GDE: I had my secondary and high school education in Ordu (a city in the Black Sea Region). In the newspapers we were receiving in our homes, Turkey's most important caricaturists Turhan Selçuk and Ulvi Ali Ersoy's wordless cartoons, drawings and their commentary style on the subjects drew my interest as well as graphic artist Mengü Ertel. The first painter I learnt of when I was in high school was Van Gogh, maybe that's why I use a lot of vibrant colours.

After high school I studied construction engineering for two years, during this time my interest in caricature increased, I've done some work in the caricature field in my own way. During my fine arts education I was influenced by the surrealism movement. In the course of art history, the first surrealist movement and Rene Magritte who was one of the pioneers of this movement attracted my attention. The atmosphere, fantasy, illusion, the surreal in his pictures and the expressions in his caricatures impressed me. In the library of the school, whenever I see caricature but expressed like pictures I said 'I must do so'.

I was especially interested in Brad Holland, Milton Glaser, Belgian Jean-Michel Folon, André François, Steinberg, Guy Billoute, Adolf Born, etc. and their work during my student years. I followed other artists I discovered, apart from the teachers in the school, I accepted the artists that I've never known but only seen their work in the books as my teachers. It is inevitable and human to be influenced by other artists and arts movements.

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PAS: Name your major awards, what they mean to you and how you see the role of competitions in the development of an artist? What is your main advice to any new artists who are considering participating in contests? Could you take this opportunity to take our readers through your current exhibition portfolio by providing details about their process of creation, and what message(s) they contain?



GDE: I began to participate in contests during my student years (I had already won 12 awards when I was graduating from school). In later years I continued to participate in competitions, and received 71 awards; 44 national and 27 international. One of the important awards I received is the 1st prize in the 2. Simavi (Aydın Doğan) International Caricature Contest in 1984 (a little white bird, a dove uproots a huge olive tree and takes it) and in 1997, I received Journalists Association Sedat Simavi Plastic Arts Prize that is given once a year in various areas such as sports, literature, health, etc.

Then I began, for nearly twenty years, to take part in juries and stopped being a competitor. 148 pieces in my 2014 exhibition were not entered in any competition; they were made only to share on Facebook. The messages of my work in this exhibition are carried and delivered, as I'd answered before, by my visual comments on present realities.

Competitions have been second school for me, thanks to them I have developed my creativity and through the competitions I've been constantly producing.

PAS: Which of your exhibitions do you consider your masterpiece and how does it represent you better than any other?

GDE: So far I have twenty-two solo exhibitions; I have tried to show the highest performance in each exhibition. It's difficult for me to say this is the best for any of my exhibitions, but this exhibition that I did between 17th February and 23rd March 2014 at the Caddebostan Cultural Centre's gallery, (I've exhibited 152 pieces of my chosen work, which I made to share on social media in the last 2-3 years) has attracted a great attention, this exhibition is important for me both qualitatively and quantitatively.

PAS: How do you see the world and what projections do you have for the future? Are you apocalyptic?

GDE: World technology is evolving very rapidly, but people using the technology are increasingly losing their human characteristics. Feeling, the main feature that makes us human is in a daily process of being lost. In many parts of the world, millions of people are still so primitive as in the early ages, man with technology as he lives dependently on the tools he uses becomes lonely. (For example, in the cafes, homes people sit side by side but everyone is busy with the computer in their hands, conversation, discussion, sharing are gradually decreasing; a situation looking like being together, yet being alone). Consumption-oriented life style is taking the human away from humanity and nature. In the future, when the world's natural resources decrease and the air pollution increases, eventually the world will be uninhabitable or man will notice his possible extinction and will manage to begin to live consciously and will save the world and himself from destruction. I do not believe in the apocalyptic, I think before the destruction of the world; a small number of people with advanced science and technology will migrate to other planets and establish a new world there (already on Mars and the Moon they've begun to form human living conditions).

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PAS: [“] ‘There is no winner in the war’
30 November 2010[“].

The title of this artwork clearly states that war is futile, which raises questions such as why do all the nation states have armies and what is the relevance of organisations such as NATO and Turkey’s membership of it from the artist point of view?

GDE: 'There is no winner in war' phrase is very true, only those who sell weapons, gun producers, capitalism win, the people fighting are doomed to lose. Turkey being in NATO is a result of the management of the country, in my opinion, Turkey should be fully independent, but I also know that it is a utopia; my personal opinion is not enough to change the outcome.



PAS: [“]’Peace’
6 May 2013[“].

This image: a white dove with an olive branch in its mouth nestling on the heads of soldiers continues your advocacy for peace with the symbolism of non-militarisation. Talk us through the image and why you think peace is so important now since we know that the first and second world wars provide the basis for world domination by western powers who with Russia are currently engaged in military posturing over Ukraine and the Crimea.

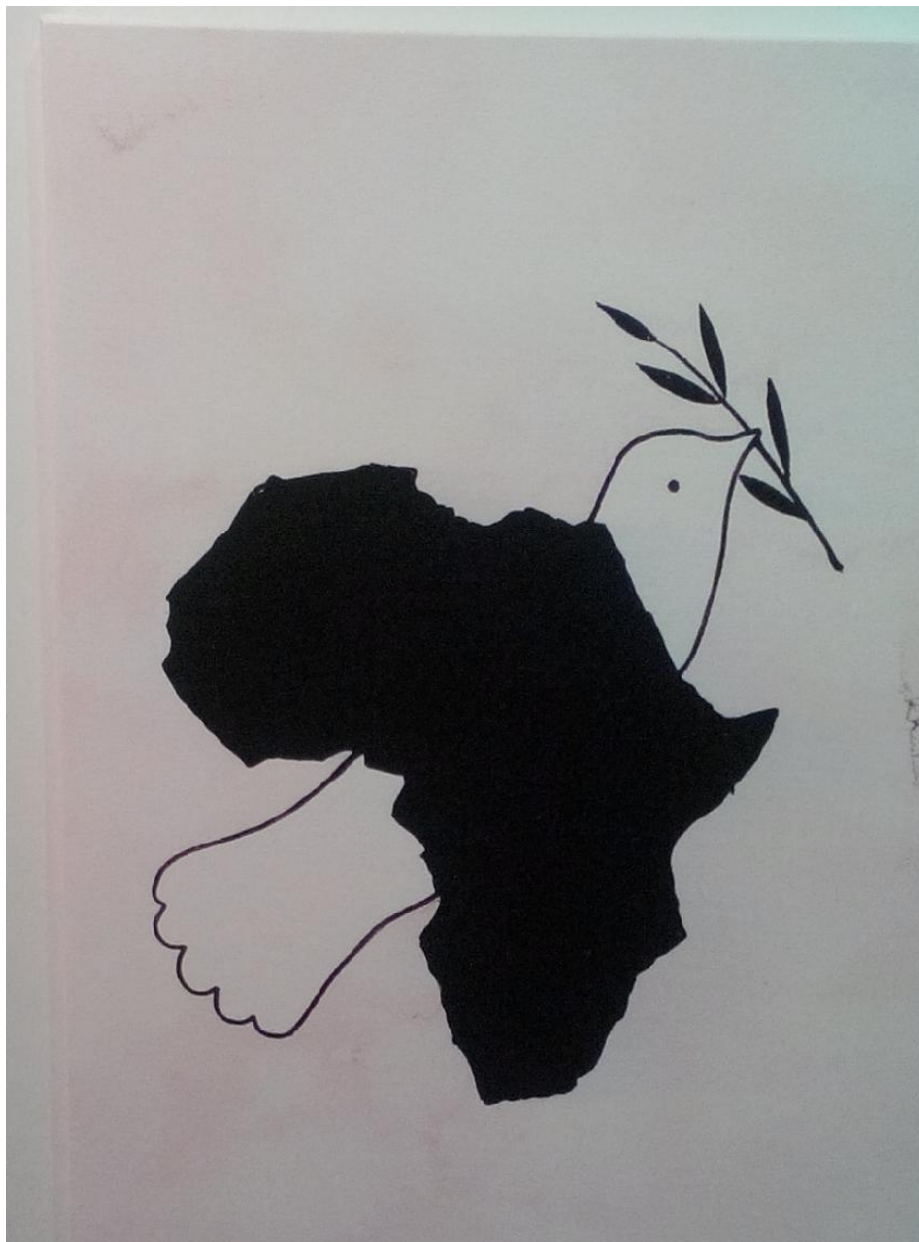
GDE: In this work, the message I want to give is that of militaristic proliferation. To the 'peace dove' the military helmets resemble eggs and she incubates them to increase the peace; it's an effort of a hope that cannot be carried out against the growing war.

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PAS: Your international war issues and the desire for peace are presented in the stark reality of the cost of war, which in this specific case is a brush looking like a coffin draped in American flag. Is it your stance that the US is the bearer of the costs of war, or the perpetrator of wars or both? What is the significance of the double metaphors of a brush and a coffin since we were used to seeing American military coffins draped in the American flag (first and second Iraqi invasions spring to mind)? Can you explain to our readers any relationship, artistic or otherwise, that may exist between the camouflaged people-coffin in what looks like the Turkish flag with the American brush-coffin?

GDE: What I want to say with the American flagged brush is that America intervenes verbally in other countries' management. In Turkish there is a phrase: 'lambasting, gets a scolding'. The traces of the brush on the surface highlight the keel-haul. From time to time Turkey receives berating too, that's why I did this work.



PAS: In the image, the dove with the olive branch slices through Central Africa cutting across southern West Africa to north east Africa carrying the continent as a whole in flight. Is this a wishful thinking for peace in Africa by highlighting areas of the continent needing peace urgently or is there more to it especially that you have chosen to represent Africa as black when there are diverse colours of people in Africa if one compares in general terms North Africans to West Africans or to South Africans, bearing in mind that there is so much diversity of colours and languages in each African country? Or is this just for effect whereby a white dove contrasts well with a black map of Africa?

GDE: I did this work when Nelson Mandela died. Mandela is a hero who liberates South Africa. The continent of Africa is here in the form of the wings of freedom doves, it represents MANDELA who emphasized the dream of free Africa.

PAS: Finally, what is the place of humour or religion or politics in your art and what do you think about the banning of Twitter and Youtube in Turkey?

GDE: I think religion is a need that exists innate in man. I'd like religion just to remain in private, and not to be questioned. To defend religion or being against religion divides people and creates hostility. Major reasons of wars in the world are because of religious differences. If there was no religion or only one religion in the world, then perhaps there would not be wars in the world. Humor is an important way I interpret events, visual communication is based on creativity and humor. Education, economy, health; everything is in politics, and therefore we are in politics even if we don't want to be. The class status I am in is the one that sees people as equal regardless of any religion, race or language and human as part of nature.

There is no freedom where there is prohibition, I am against all prohibitions.



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