

Unfolding the Structures of Sound

Cevdet Erek in conversation with Başak Şenova

Başak Şenova

010 / 8 May 2017

Cevdet Erek played in the music band Nekropsi while studying BA in architecture at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, then he studied "Sound Engineering & Design" at the Center for Advanced Studies in Music (MIAM) at Istanbul Technical University. He has experimented with sound, rhythm and space since 2007 by following a certain line of thinking and approach Erek has developed through various projects. For Raumder Rhythmen at dOCUMENTA 13 in 2012, for instance, his sound installation in an empty floor of the C&A Department Store in Kassel worked with mixed media and architectural additions in different dimensions. Then, in the 11th Sharjah Biennial in 2013, with Courtyard Ornamentation with 4 Sounding Dots and a Shade, he placed four directional loudspeakers on the walls surrounding the courtyard of Bait Gholoum Ibrahim, in Sharjah's Heritage Area, where each loud speaker plays a percussive pattern repeated at set intervals by creating various combinations. This year, he will also be showing at the 57th Venice Biennale, where he will show ÇIN, a site-specific work that will be presented in the Pavilion of Turkey. In this conversation, Erek talks about his practice, and also gives some hints about his project at the 57th Venice Biennale.



Cevdet Erek, Courtyard Ornamentation with 4 Sounding Dots and a Shade, 2013.
Copyright the artist.

Başak Şenova: As an immersive experience for the visitor, you create spaces for various mental mechanisms by using spatial and aural units and patterns. These spaces are mostly perceived through patterns and beats; in many instances, architectural interventions shape such an experience; and sometimes, textual material or objects articulate layers to it. How do you describe and locate the aspect of 'performing' in this experience?

Cevdet Erek: Most of my spatial work invites the audience and occasionally other artists to perform to get more from it. But if I do perform in the installations, I follow different paths, for instance confronting or strengthening an aspect of it ... Let's say that I add the improvising body as a part of the given work. By 'strengthening' I mean tracing some the gentle elements of the installation and accentuating them. In the case of 'confronting'; it could be the placing of the body in front of the system, or against the digital network running the installation and its outputs, the dominating spatial organisation.

BS: The performing aspect, which is activated with aural components, does not only create attentiveness, but also distracts the visitor where sounds interplay with the architecture and the space. How does 'experimentation' have a role in this setting?



WHERE ARE WE NOW?
Hicham Khalidi in conversation with Daniella Rose King



THEN AND NOW
Adelina von Fürstenberg in conversation with Stephanie Bailey



ON BUILDING NATIONS
A two-part conversation with Szabolcs KissPál and Mahmoud Khaleel



A FAUSTIAN PACT
Notes on Geo-cultural Exhibitions
Natasha Hoare



HISTORY IN PLAY
Hammad Nasar in conversation with Reema Salha Fadda



THE ARAB NUDE
The Artist as Awakener at AUB
Anneka Lenssen



ARCHIVING A REVOLUTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE, ARCHIVING AS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE
Lara Baladi



TOWARDS A SPATIAL IMAGINARY
Walking Cabbages and Watermelons
Heba Y. Amin



FAHRELNISSA ZEID IN THE MEGA-MUSEUM
Mega-museums and modern artists from the Middle East
Sarah-Neel Smith



THE TURN المنعرج
Socially Engaged Art Practices in Tunisia
Christine Bruckbauer, Patricia K. Triki



IBRAAZ 5TH ANNIVERSARY
Ibraaz

CE: From my side, experimentation is at the heart of this setting. All spatial installations are new experiments. They include repetition but don't want to repeat themselves. Then there is experimentation done by a portion of the visitors / viewers / participators et cetera; how to move or stand in the space, how to hear, how to loop a route.



Cevdet Ereğ, Ruler 1 Cairo, Ruler 1 Istanbul, Ruler 1 Antwerp, 2007-2009.
Copyright the artist.

BS: At this point, I would like to re-visit the Egypt experience with your residency at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo for the Light, Illumination, Electricity that took place in 2007. Light, Illumination, Electricity was designed as an event in process together with The Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art, santralistanbul, ZINC – ECM de la Friche Belle de Mai, NOMAD and SCCA. It aimed to document the multiplicity and diversity of ideas and practices around electricity and light. At the same time, it engendered artists' reflections and perceptions of various cities, along with sequences and narrations of memory. The project attempted to follow the journey of the resident artists and their works and documented their progression with various presentation formats and fields of research. I think it was a specific moment when you instigated the idea of the 'ruler' in your work – in which you use the measuring instruments, either as objects or bases for forms, not as timelines but 'timeline makers'.

CE: The first ruler (Ruler Cairo, 2007) was done there. I didn't have a clear idea to continue doing other rulers, but it became the series Rulers and Rhythm Studies; it was finalized with a title in 2011, but has been expanding since in different forms. It was Ramadan. Ramadan was more intense in Egypt than in Istanbul. It was good to remember, compare and experience the radical and periodic change in using time in general.

BS: In what way was Egypt an aural experience?

CE: Music for sure, the beat, its formal elements, how it is produced and how people move to/with it. Being inside a city that is one of the main radiators of a certain sonic culture. I've been familiar with that culture through media – the record, the radio. Coming from a drumming and percussion background – which is also informed by certain dialects of that sonic culture in Turkey – adds a lot. In *Akla Kara* (2014), which is still being shown at Istanbul Modern, I used those eight-piece relay systems to play a daf that I bought in Cairo, programmed a beat and invited a saggat player to improvise in the machine. Then I made the notation, then converted it to an abstract Kufic, then exposed them to some other timelines, then the design of the marriage rings. I think a lot happened while there.

BS: Could you talk about how the perception of time in Egypt along with the 'noise' of the city of Cairo is reflected in your work?

CE: Egypt and my experience with it both feel far away, as I could never return since then. Noises-wise, other than the noisy stereos playing bombastic or creepy beats, I remember that I was talking about the difference in using the car horn – in comparison with here in Istanbul, using the simple signal language in a different way. In Istanbul the horn is used a lot to punish, or as an expression of anger. In Cairo I remember, on a long ride, that the horn of an older system of car horns was kindly and continuously beeping us to say 'I am here' as a place marker for other cars. Then, there were continuous announcement of verses, in or from a kind of shop, to the street, and to the house from a distance. Familiar, but intense, tough and widespread – distorted through a weak playback system. Were these placed in the work directly? Not at all, but they had an effect.



**EFFECTIVE ON THE GROUND AND
INVISIBLE TO THE GLOBAL ART
MARKET**

Participatory Art in the Middle East

Pamela Karimi



REVISITING INTERNATIONALISTS

**Fadi Bardawil in conversation with
Zeynep Oz**



**RETURN TO THE FORMER
MIDDLE EAST**

**Ibraaz 5th Year Anniversary
Editorial**

Anthony Downey



STILL (THE) BARBARIANS

**Koyo Kouoh in conversation with
Stephanie Bailey**

SSS - Shore Scene Soundtrack / SSS - Sahil Sahnesi Sesi

01:12



Cevdet Erek

SSS - Shore Scene Soundtrack / SSS – Sahil Sahnesi Sesi, 2008

1 min 12 secs (excerpt)

SSS, the Shore Scene Soundtrack is about mimicking the sea, or imitating a very common piece of nature, by using 2 hands and a piece of carpet.

Installation includes the video of a recording session of SSS and a carpet to be used for the performance. In video, a carpet is being rubbed by a half naked man, with a series of massage-like hand movements. The very dramatic image is irregularly interrupted by some short scenes e.g. zooming in to the hands or showing the sound engineers located behind the glass of the recording room.

BS: The Light, Illumination, Electricity project cultivated an exhibition in the Energy Museum at Santralistanbul on 2007. What can you say about the processes of moving and translating the work to Turkey?

CE: It was good to see how Arabic is seen in Turkey, among friends and people: a reminder of Old Turkish from Ottoman period, with Arabic letters, or the religious, and more or less unreadable but familiar, exotic, false, even scary for some. I immediately made a version of the first Ruler in Turkish (in Latin) with the 'now' of that time, sometime in 2008, in trend showing together. Then those works started travelling all together with new additions.

BS: Your projects often link and/or give references to each other. How do these links circulate in your works? And why this continuity is important for you?

CE: As in the case of Rulers, which I mentioned above, some works have some parts that are fully open to the production of variations, so they are naturally continuous. Then, some themes – for example the sonic timeline, the sonic ornamentation, rhythm – in general are common between them, and in their togetherness occasionally say more than in the isolation of the single.

BS: What do you think about isolation and participation with regards to how a visitor engages with a work? How does your approach reflect the relationship between the terms intimacy and engagement that come into play?

CE: The work is done for everybody, but the diligent visitor gets in deep. Attention, moving, synchronization, looping, re-routing in the space is the visitor's part in the play, and the work happens when some of these are done. And other than a few examples like SSS – Shore Scene Soundtrack, there's no instruction or recipe for how to conduct those actions.



[Cookie policy](#)

Stereo mix (excerpt) of 3 audio channels played through installed directional loudspeakers.

3 channel sound, 3 directional loudspeakers, anti-pigeon net, steel wires

Photo: Cevdet Ereğ, Sky Ornamentation with 3 Sounding Dots and Anti-Pigeon Net, 2010. Installation view / Tactics of Invisibility, Thyssen-Bonemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna.

BS: Unpredictability is another strong aspect of the work, with spatial fragmentation by sounds that fill the space creating an increasing tension fuelled by a sense of curiosity. Why and how do you utilize curiosity?

CE: The curious get more out of this type of work, that's for sure. The curiosity before getting into the work, probably triggered by some signals – the expectation – is a part of the process. Curiosity when within it, to discover, or to get more in repetition is already part of the chemistry. Then if some further curiosity is triggered after being in the work, curiosity about certain themes handled, or related work, other artists' work, or 'more' about life in general. What could be better?

BS: Would you describe the project Çın that you have been developing for the Pavilion of Turkey this year?

CE: Instead of trying to describe a work that is meant to be experienced on-site, and is still in the phase of formation, I propose to imagine a scene together as an exercise: there is a fenced ruin in the distance with a guard inside of it who should not leave during the day. The guard, while walking in silence, notices a visitor who carefully peeks around and the concert of thousands of crickets thanks to the visitor. This duo who try to talk to each other at a distance, briefly cry out at the same time from the ear pain caused by a violent noise that occurs out of the blue. Then, at night, in another place as the guard tries to suppress the ringing in her ears by opening the window two fingerbreadths and the noise a notch, enters an alarm sound: 'viyuyiyuyiyuyiyu.' Then she tries to imagine again in the same order by going back to the beginning.

BS: Do you see this piece as an extension of earlier projects?

CE: It's quite a specific project for the Pavilion of Turkey. But in general, how I treat that space is in common with how I treated some others earlier. That's why in the same press conference I talked about some of the methods and concepts that I experiment with in the earlier works. I made an emphasis on the series based works e.g. Room of Rhythms, Rulers and Rhythm Studies and Sound Ornamentations. So, it's a new work, but an extension on a long path as well.

BS: In your installations, the sounds never distinctly set themselves apart from the space. Nevertheless, for me, they also function as a reminder of 'passing time' by underlining possible connections with the notion of time with temporality. Could you elaborate on this connection with Çın in the context of Venice?

CE: I am not going to elaborate before opening the work, but a note: Çın is onomatopoeia, a ding. I always imagined it as a sound signal that informs of an event to come, rather than being a more explanatory title. You can imagine the moment of someone hitting a wine glass with a knife, to gain attention and talk in a gathering, shortly – or keeping on hitting the glass rather than talking, çı-çı-çı-çın if you like.



Cevdet Ereğ, Jingle, 2012 glass, ipod, sound.
Photo: Peter Cox

BS: Could you talk about the experience of visiting Çın as an intimate process for the visitor to connect with her/his personal memory through the reminiscence of sound?

CE: This work wants to trigger or to relate to memories of the visitor, that's for sure. And then, hopefully, it wants to become a memory for some, which will be triggered in some future spaces and moments.

BS: The work is the entire 'space', not the arrangement of components within space. In this respect, the work also integrates the body of the visitor as being part of the unified space. How do you perceive and recognize the body of the visitor within the structure of Çın?

CE: The moment a body gets moving in the space – the work starts. I don't mean there's an interaction with a sensor et cetera. The only way to grasp the work, which is primarily based on the interrelations of elements, is moving/positioning inside or with it.

BS: What are your expectations with the Pavilion of Turkey at the Venice Biennial; what would you hope Çın might generate?

CE: I have lots of expectations. I think I gave some hints already, when I was talking about past work. I prefer not to say more just days before starting installing, before adding the improvised elements, which is when it really starts.

But in very general I am hoping that it generates some hope of change and energy for those who work or live within restricted conditions and areas that are also full of potential. It shall generate some grooves to continue.

Cevdet Ereğ (Istanbul, 1974) During and after studying architecture at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Ereğ worked at various architectural practices as well as in the music band Nekropsi. Upon finishing masters in Sound Engineering & Design at İTÜ MIAM Center for Advanced Studies in Music, he was an artist in residence at Rijksakademie in Amsterdam in 2005–2006. Ereğ's installations and performances were shown in dOCUMENTA (13) (2012); Istanbul Biennial (2003, 2013 and 2015), Sydney Biennial (2016), Sharjah Biennial (2013), Stedelijk Museum (2014), MAXXI (2014 and 2015), Istanbul Modern (2014, 2015 and 2016), Arter (2011), SALT (2012 ve 2015) and others. Major solo exhibitions of his work were organized by Spike Island in Bristol, titled Alt Üst (2014), and Week at Kunsthalle Basel (2012). His published books are: SSS – Shore Scene Soundtrack (2008, BAS), Room of Rhythms 1 (2012, Walther König) and Less Empty Maybe (2015, Revolver/Artist). SSS – Shore Scene Soundtrack was the recipient of Nam June June Paik Media Art Prize given by Kunststiftung NRW (2012). Among his most recent sound/music work are; sound and music direction for Kaan Müjdeci's feature-length film Sivas (71st Venice International Film Festival – Special Jury Prize, 2014), music and sound co-design for Emin Alper's feature-length film Frenzy (72nd Venice International Film Festival – Special Jury Prize, 2015). Since 2011, Cevdet Ereğ teaches at ITU and lives in Istanbul.

TAGS

Interview

Exhibitions

Sound

Biennial

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Başak Şenova

Başak Şenova is a curator and designer; studied Literature and Graphic Design (MFA in Graphic Design and Ph.D. in Art, Design and Architecture at Bilkent University) and attended the 7th Curatorial Training Programme of Stichting De Appel, Amsterdam. She has been writing on art, technology and media, initiating and developing projects and curating exhibitions since 1995.

Senova is an editorial correspondent for ibraaz.org; Turkish correspondent of Flash Art International, and one of the founding members of NOMAD, as well as the organizer of [ctrl_alt_del](#) sound art project and [Upgrade!Istanbul](#). She curated Zorlu Center Collection for two years (2011-2012). Senova is an advisory board member of the Istanbul Biennial (2014-present). As an assistant professor, she lectured in various universities in Istanbul such as Kadir Has University, Bilgi University, Koç University and Bilkent University. At the moment, she is lecturing at Ankara Social Sciences University and the resident fellow at the University of the Arts, Helsinki in co-operation with HIAP. Senova was the curator of the Pavilion of Turkey at the 53rd Venice Biennale. She co-curated the UNCOVERED (Cyprus) and the 2nd Biennial of Contemporary Art, D-0 ARK Underground (Bosnia and Herzegovina). In 2014, she acted as the Art Gallery Chair of (ACM) SIGGRAPH 2014 (Vancouver) the curator of the Helsinki Photography Biennial 2014 and the Jerusalem Show. In 2015, she curated the Pavilion of Republic of Macedonia at the 56th Venice Biennale and in 2016, Lines of Passage (in medias res) Exhibition in Lesvos.

Currently, Senova is working on the CrossSections project in Vienna, Helsinki, and Stockholm.

[FACEBOOK](#)

[TWITTER](#)

[INSTAGRAM](#)

[E-NEWSLETTER](#)

[RSS](#)

Copyright © Ibraaz 2018

[Terms & Conditions](#)
