

# *BANU CENNETOĞLU*

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Banu Cennetoğlu's solo show at Bonner Kunstverein began outside, where the lamps in the square shone red, yellow and green. The three colours of the work *A Problematic Triad: Yellow Red Green* (2015) are 'problematic' because they symbolize Kurdish cultural identity – the colours, customs and language of which are still repressed in Cennetoğlu's native Turkey. Recently, Bonn made headlines when the German drugstore chain DM cancelled planned fundraising events for a local Kurdish community organization after a hate campaign by racist Turkish citizens. As a result, passers-by will have associated the work with more than just traffic lights and Rastafarians.

In 2006, Cennetoğlu founded *BAS* (which translates roughly as 'Print'), a project space in Istanbul that produces, collects and sells artists' books. In 2009, she exhibited in the Turkish pavilion at the Venice Biennale, giving her interest in the collecting, archiving and distribution of information an international profile. In Bonn, this interest was reflected in her flanking the entrance to the exhibition (the first under new director Michelle Cotton) with two calendar pages by Hanne Darboven borrowed from the Kunstverein's art library. As well as integrating the institution's own collection, *My Temporary Darboven* (2015) referenced a conceptual artist who also captured the stream of daily events and whose work was on show round the corner at the Bundeskusthalle at the same time. Whereas Darboven wrote against time, Cennetoğlu writes with it, feeding written material into her archive.

For her most recent work *11.08.2015* (2015), Cennetoğlu collected an issue of almost every daily newspaper published in Germany on 11 August 2015. Ordered alphabetically and bound in slim volumes, the thousand or so papers lay on a long table. The artist has applied this principle several times before, for example in England and Turkey (where a total of just 209 newspapers

were published on the day in question in 2010). At first glance, the main impression is one of quantity, but leafing through the volumes, the unfamiliar sense of parallelism raises questions: What is newsworthy? Which medium upholds which ideology and how is it conveyed? One need only take another look at Turkey to understand that freedom of the press is an achievement that needs to be protected. The impact of this work was multiplied by the links to other works in the show, a richly interconnected quality that gave it additional dynamism.

From the ceiling hung 23 golden helium balloons in the shape of letters spelling out the title of the work, *ICHWEISSZWARABERDENNOCH* (I know very well but all the same, 2015) – a quotation from the French psychoanalyst and ethnologist Octave Mannoni (1899-1989) who studied the relationship between psychology and colonialism. ‘Je sais bien, mais quand même’ (I know better, but anyway), as the original states, refers to a belief in something that is at odds with one’s own experience – the structure of denial reduced to a brief phrase. The link to the many metres of cover stories about Greece and the refugee crisis that crossed the space like a wall was obvious. Everyone knows the urge to do something about the injustices of the world. But this awareness rarely leads to action and one’s initial enthusiasm wanes, like the helium balloons that stayed up during the opening before sagging lower and lower over the duration of the show.

The video work *What is it that you are worried about?* (2013), shown in a cube in the centre of the room, also revolves around themes of belief/superstition. In 2013, Cennetoğlu was invited to participate in the Biennale for Contemporary Art D-o ARK Underground in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her piece dealt with the biennial’s historically charged exhibition location, a huge bunker in Konjic, a small town near Sarajevo. It was built by Yugoslavia’s former President Tito as a nuclear fallout shelter for himself, his wife and senior staff. Instead of retelling the building’s already legendary history (although it took nearly 30 years to complete, costing billions, no one noticed it until after the end of the wars in Balkans), Cennetoğlu collaborated with the healer Yasemin Özcan, who subjected the bunker to a ‘holographic energy purification’. The treatment lasted 35 minutes, during which Özcan, speaking in the earnest tone of a newsreader, described the spiritual state of this wartime relic and prepared it for its imminent future as a museum. Here, too, opposites collide: when the magic used in the film meets the supposedly ‘serious’ information in the newspapers, the usual lines between truth and fabrication are called into question.

Cennetoğlu’s work renders the relativity and mutability of knowledge palpable. As well as

showing what societies recognize as serious knowledge, thus highlighting their own self-image, she also brings up ways for individuals and (art) institutions to participate. At the end of the show, an actual mirror was present. *What is it that you are worried about?* (2013) read the inscription in the oval glass on the wall at the exit. And while I sip at my glass of wine, lost in thought, terror is already being unleashed in Paris.

<https://www.frieze.com/article/banu-cennetoğlu>