

Impact Report (2009-2020):

## **Mobilising Queer Practice: enabling cross-cultural dialogues with Turkey**

### **Dr Cüneyt Çakırlar**

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## **1. Summary of the impact**

Cüneyt Çakırlar's research (2009-2020) has challenged cultural stereotypes, promoted intercultural dialogue and supported international circulation of cultural forms and practices. The impact builds organically on Çakırlar's research in global queer theory and the transnational mobility of contemporary arts, as expressed in publications and deployed in pedagogic contexts, and collaborative work with international art practitioners and institutions. The research has demonstrated impact achieved through cross-cultural dialogue between the West and Turkey in four key areas: shaping the HE curriculum and broadening understandings of LGBTQ issues in Turkey; mentoring Turkish students inspired by LGBTQ practice by supporting their development as academics, activists and policy makers; enabling and promoting international mobility of Turkey-based art practitioners' work; and facilitating cross-cultural exchange and international collaboration between UK-based cultural practitioners and Turkey-based artists through UK-based projects.

## **2. Underpinning research**

The rise of authoritarian nationalism around the world promotes heteronormative models of identity and belonging that many people, especially artists and activists, find deeply oppressive. Simultaneously, increased attention to #MeToo feminism and LGBTQ movements in international networks of academia highlights the need to challenge universalising frameworks for sexual identity. Non-Western LGBTQ cultural practitioners, scholars and activists seek greater visibility to enhance public understanding of sexual identity and the complex geopolitics at work in its various expressions. Challenging Eurocentric perspectives, Çakırlar engages with regional actors and practitioners to rethink intersectional, cross-cultural frameworks. Çakırlar's research intervenes in this context by combining gender/sexuality studies, contemporary visual arts and film/documentary studies. It proposes analytical frameworks that probe globally mobile visual cultures to contest cultural essentialism and exoticism. It enhances the public visibility of art practices inspired by LGBTQ dissidence. It brought new theoretical tools to the HE curriculum in Turkey. Consistent with Çakırlar's commitment to intercultural exchange, it generated new knowledge in dialogue with institutions, artists, scholars and students, seeing them as active participants in the research and building their needs into its processes.

Çakırlar's dialogic research practice and intercultural translation has been in evidence since his postdoctoral studies on the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship Programme at UCL, where he ran the research cluster "Translations/Transpositions: Intergeneric Translations", organising, curating and moderating public engagement activities, which included an invited lecture series tackling mobility and translation in visual arts, and a year-long programme, "Queering the Film, Filming the Queer" (2009), interrogating LGBTQ filmmaking and arts in international contexts. Research outputs were published in peer-reviewed journals including [Paragraph](#) and [Screen](#) (Çakırlar 2011). Focusing on Turkey-based contemporary artists and proposing "a non-hierarchical relation between local and global modes of intelligibility" (Çakırlar 2011: 361; 2012; 2013; 2015), these studies analyse and challenge conventional distinctions between local and global cultural belonging.

As visiting fellow in three universities in Istanbul (2009-2012), Çakırlar tested his cross-cultural theoretical framework, in the classroom and beyond, by working with young LGBTQ cultural practitioners. He delivered workshops in collaboration with LGBTQ activist organisations, convened and taught modules on “Film, Genre, Gender” (Koç University), “Film, Ethics, Erotics” (Boğaziçi University), “Queer Politics and Contemporary Film” (Boğaziçi University), and “[Gender, Queer and Body in Aesthetic Expression](#)” (Istanbul Bilgi University). He brought undergraduates and postgraduates together with LGBTQ activists to initiate debate on queer theory/activism, its global mobility, and the contribution it can make to LGBTQ cultural production in Turkey. These conversations fed into the framework of *Cinsellik Muammasi: Türkiye’de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet [The Sexuality Conundrum: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey]*”, published by leading Turkish publisher [Metis](#) (Çakırlar & Delice 2012): a multi-disciplinary collection of 26 research pieces on LGBTQ cultures authored (in Turkish) by leading academics, activists and artists based in Turkey, France, Netherlands, UK, and USA [[link](#)]. The majority of contributions were translated into English in leading peer reviewed journals (e.g. [[1](#)], [[2](#)], [[3](#)], [[4](#)] and Çakırlar 2011, 2013, 2015). The collection challenged the ways in which Western sexual identity categories and theories assimilate local cultural forms of sexual subjectivity. Rather than seeing the global mobility of queer theories and categories as a hierarchical, one-way imposition, the project suggested a reciprocal interaction that changes and transforms local and global understandings. The same desire to use his research to enable intercultural dialogue around queer theory drove Çakırlar’s co-translation of Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* (1993) into Turkish ([2014](#)).

With close attention to processes of intercultural dialogue and translation, the critical framework of *Cinsellik Muammasi* (2012) informed Çakırlar’s subsequent research to open up representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary art practices in Turkey to international audiences. He was commissioned by Sotheby’s to co-author the exhibition/auction essays for LGBTQ-themed paintings by Istanbul-based hyperrealist painter Taner Ceylan ([[1](#)], [[2](#)]). As a result of these publications, he was invited by Paul Kasmin Gallery (NYC, USA) to co-author the exhibition catalogue for Ceylan’s show in NYC, *Lost Paintings Series*. The catalogue offered in-depth analysis of Ceylan’s exploration of queer erotics and same-sex desire in Ottoman/Turkish historical contexts, and his engagement with Orientalist painting and western canons of modern and contemporary art ([Çakırlar, Delice & Shaw 2013](#)).

Çakırlar’s cross-cultural translation of LGBTQ practice gained a further interdisciplinary dimension by integrating debates on “scale” and “regionality” in cultural geography with issues of identity politics in contemporary documentary and performance arts. This work demonstrated the extent to which art practices change their meaning when international circulation informs critical interpretation and reception (Çakırlar 2011; 2013; 2015; 2017c). A symposium he co-organised at NTU, [Queer/ing Regions](#), brought together scholars across human geography and transnational sexuality studies. It resulted in a dedicated section he edited for *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* ([Çakırlar 2016](#)).

The cross-sectoral influence of Çakırlar’s research has led to commissioned scholarship bringing together queer theory and art criticism with knowledge of local production contexts to elucidate the circulation and reception of specific artworks in national and international contexts. He was commissioned by [ARTER – Space for Art](#) to author a critical review of British art duo Jake and Dinos Chapman’s art practice for the exhibition monograph titled *In The Realm of Senseless* (Çakırlar 2017a), published in English and Turkish, for the duo’s first large-scale retrospective exhibition. He was invited to co-author the exhibition catalogue of *Homo Fragilis*, the solo show of Erineç Seymen, a key contemporary queer artist based in Istanbul, Turkey (Çakırlar 2017b). He wrote a commissioned article for the solo show of Paris-based French-Moroccan artist Soufiane Ababri at THE PILL (Istanbul, Turkey) which explored the cross-cultural mobility of LGBTQ art practices with particular reference to Ababri’s engagement with postcolonial sexualities via site-specific art projects in Paris, London and Istanbul ([Çakırlar 2019](#), [Turkish](#) and [English](#)).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

TRANSLATION. Butler, J. 2014. *Bela Bedenler: "Cinsiyet" in Söylemsel Sınırları Üzerine* [Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"], trans. C. Çakırlar with Z. Talay, Istanbul: Pinhan.

EDITED COLLECTION. Çakırlar, C. & Delice, S. (eds.) 2012. *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet* [Sexuality Conundrum: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey], Istanbul: Metis.

#### JOURNAL ARTICLES:

-Çakırlar, C. 2017c. 'Transnational Pride, Global Closets and Regional Formations of Screen Activism: Documentary LGBTQ narratives from Turkey'. *Journal of Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 31 (2), pp. 14-42.

-Çakırlar, C. 2013. 'Aesthetics of self-scaling: parallaxed transregionalism and Kutluğ Ataman's art practice'. *Journal of Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 27 [December 2013], pp. 684-706.

-Çakırlar, C., 2011. 'Queer art of parallaxed document: the visual discourse of docudrag in Kutluğ Ataman's Never My Soul!', *Screen* 52 (3), pp. 358-375.

#### EXHIBITION CATALOGUES/MONOGRAPHS/ESSAYS:

- Çakırlar, C. 2019. 'Pink Cheeks, Brown Shades: Soufiane Ababri's Queer Erotics', *Manifold*, published online on 03/01/2019: <https://manifold.press/pembe-yanaklar-kahverengi-tonlar-soufiane-ababri-nin-queer-erotizmi> [English version]

-Çakırlar, C. 2017b. 'The Non-ameliorative art: Erinç Seymen's Scenes of Cruel Optimism'. *Erinç Seymen: Homo Fragilis*. Istanbul & Berlin: Zilberman Gallery, pp. 34-55.

-Çakırlar, C. 2017a. 'Aesthetic inertia, bathetic death: on the profoundly banal art of Jake and Dinos Chapman'. *Jake & Dinos Chapman: In the Realm of the Senseless*. Istanbul, Turkey: ARTER, pp. 60-95.

-Çakırlar, C., Delice, S. and Shaw, W.M.K. 2013. *Taner Ceylan: the lost paintings*. New York: Damiani/Paul Kasmin Gallery, November 2013.

#### BOOK CHAPTER:

Çakırlar, C. 2015. 'Unsettling the Patriot: Troubled Objects of Masculinity and Nationalism.' in (eds) Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer*, Oxford: Palgrave Macmillan, 81-97.

#### JOURNAL SPECIAL SECTION:

Çakırlar, C. 2016. 'Introduction to Queer/ing Regions', Special Section: Queer/ing Regions, ed. Cüneyt Çakırlar, *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 23(11), pp. 1615-8.

### 4. Details of the impact

Primarily focused on LGBTQ cultural practices and queer studies, Çakırlar's work promotes the cross-cultural mobility of contemporary arts. Underpinned by collaborative work with Turkey-based art institutions, universities, artists and activists, the work shaped practices of curation, exhibition, public programming and public engagement in local and global contexts. It structured public debates and stimulated intercultural dialogue. Impact occurred in four areas: (a) by shaping the HE curriculum and understandings of LGBTQ issues in Turkey; (b) by mentoring Turkish students inspired by queer theory in their career development as academics, activists and policy-makers; (c) by enabling and promoting international visibility, mobility and relevance of Turkey-based art practitioners' work; and (d) by facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and international collaboration between UK-based cultural practitioners and Turkey-based artists through UK-based projects.

**(a) Shaping the HE curriculum and understandings of LGBTQ issues in Turkey by developing queer studies in the academy:**

Following visiting teaching posts in Istanbul (2009-2012) and the publication of *Cinsellik Muammasi* (2012), Çakırlar was commissioned to co-translate Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993) into Turkish (2014). Çakırlar's research have prioritised dialogue and collaboration with Turkey-based academics, university students and the younger generation of LGBTQ activists, and made a significant contribution to the HE curriculum in Turkey - especially in arts and humanities and social sciences. Çakırlar's research-led teaching practice actively promoted and consistently nurtured conversations between activists, academics and artists to ensure these exchanges enhance public visibility and understanding of LGBTQ issues in the country. Prof. Yardimci, MSGSU Head of the Centre for Women's Studies, noted that Çakırlar's work had a direct influence in "creating a hybrid field of theory-arts-activism in Turkey" (i). Reviewed by broadsheet newspapers (including *Sabah*, *Radikal*, and *Birgün*) and online platforms of key LGBTQ organisations (e.g. LambdaIstanbul and KaosGL), Çakırlar's research attained wider visibility across multiple networks of academic and public audiences. It contributed to the improvement of public awareness of LGBTQ issues in the country (v; ix). It had impact beyond Turkey: as part of the British Library's project on "LGBT Writing in the Northern Middle East", *Cinsellik Muammasi* was added to the British Library's integrated catalogue in 2017 and listed by the Turkish and Turkic Collections Curator as one of the pioneering resources that "bring English-language queer writing into Turkish" (x).

**(b) Mentoring Turkish students inspired by queer theory in their career development as academics, activists and policy-makers:**

The modules Çakırlar taught from 2009-2012 at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul Bilgi University, and Koç University were the first exclusively LGBTQ-oriented modules delivered in Turkish higher education and continue to have an impact. They provided the groundwork for the publication of *Cinsellik Muammasi* (2012) as well as the proliferation of modules on gender/queer studies on offer in various universities in the country. His teaching, translation, curriculum development and continuing mentorship continue to play a vital role by supporting the career development, as well as the activist practice, of many LGBTQ individuals. His teaching, a former student notes, "paved the way for subsequent queer theory classes; publications on queer theory proliferated; activists taking his courses has become NGO workers or researchers who try to insert queer agenda and methodology within their relevant programs and institutions" (v). Another former student describes Çakırlar's "mentorship and dedication to interdisciplinary knowledge-building, which crosses the conventional boundaries of academia, politics/activism, social sciences and arts, was inspirational to many students", and his research-led teaching significantly informed and guided students towards careers as advocacy workers, academics, artists and curators (vi).

**(c) Enabling and promoting international mobility, visibility and relevance of Turkey-based art practitioners including artists, museums and galleries**

As a result of commissioned scholarship in exhibition catalogues, published by Sotheby's (London) and Paul Kasmin Gallery (NYC) from 2009-2013, Çakırlar was invited to deliver public lectures on the international contexts of LGBTQ art production e.g. his *finissage* speech for the exhibition "Skeptical Thoughts on Love", curated by Adnan Yildiz at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (2014); he contributed to the project "Shifting Dialogues: Documenting Asian Art and Performance" funded by the Academy of Finland, which brought together artists, activists and scholars to debate cross-cultural mobility in Asian contemporary art production (2014-2015). In November 2015, he was invited to present on the international reception of Turkish LGBTQ art practices at a symposium organised by LMU Munich in collaboration with Haus der Kunst (Munich, Germany). In [November 2017](#), Çakırlar was invited to introduce the work of Turkey-based Nilbar Güreş who was one of the artists commissioned for Plymouth's [The Atlantic Project](#) in the UK (2018). Promoting the works of Turkey-based art practitioners, Çakırlar's studies of contemporary LGBTQ arts in Turkey have been a catalyst for international practitioners and debates on the transnational frameworks of gender and sexuality studies in humanities and art criticism. The visibility and adaptability of Çakırlar's research practice enabled him to "improve critical understandings of the Middle East in general and Turkey in particular", which,

in turn, helped to “build a greater understanding of non-Western cultural histories by providing a crucial contribution to contemporary debates involving LGBTQ artists outside the US and Europe” (ii).

The impact of Çakırlar’s research not only promoted the international visibility of local LGBTQ queer artists in Turkey. It also facilitated encounters of the local art audiences in Turkey with internationally acclaimed artists. His research, commissioned by the Istanbul-based gallery ARTER and the British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman, resulted in a critical study on the Chapmans’ work for the monograph accompanying their first large-scale retrospective exhibition which took place in Istanbul (see [1] and [2]). He situated the Chapmans brothers’ in contemporary art criticism and in the context of queer aesthetics. During the exhibition, he led a 2-hour long guided tour for the general public that discussed the political relevance of the Chapmans’ art for Istanbul-based audiences. ARTER’s chief curator Emre Baykal assessed both the article and the exhibition tour as “highly original and analytically rigorous”, “offering an in-depth understanding of the duo’s approach and oeuvre”, which “open[ed] up and inspir[ed] public debates on contemporary culture in the local context of Turkey” (iv).

Çakırlar’s research has promoted local and global visibility of LGBTQ art practices by introducing them to non-academic audiences and shaping public understanding of non-heteronormative cultural practices. In July 2017, commissioned by Zilberman Gallery (Berlin and Istanbul), he authored the exhibition catalogue for Turkey-based LGBTQ artist Erinç Seymen. Zilberman’s project manager Naz Cuguoğlu, points out the circulation of this catalogue “in the international art fairs (including Art Dubai, Vienna Contemporary, Art Brussels and Contemporary Istanbul) and in the libraries of international art museums (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul Modern, to name a few)”. It not only enhanced the gallery’s representation of Seymen but also “contributed to the contemporary debates on Middle Eastern cultural practices among members of different international art communities” (Source iii). In 2019, he was commissioned by the gallery The PILL (Istanbul & Paris) to author an essay reviewing the solo exhibition of the Paris-based French-Moroccan LGBTQ artist Soufiane Ababri in Istanbul, which officially introduced the artist’s work to local audiences and enhanced their understanding of diasporic LGBTQ arts. Exploring Ababri’s engagement with Western canons and genres through a diasporic/post-colonial optic, Çakırlar’s introductory essay, published in English and Turkish, facilitated a productive cross-cultural encounter between practitioners in Turkey and emerging actors on the international LGBTQ arts scene. For The PILL’s executive director Suela Cennet, Çakırlar contributed to audiences’ experience by “demonstrating the ways in which the artist is using cross-cultural references to different canons of modern art, and in highlighting how the artist exposes the ideological dimensions of how particular bodies from particular geographies are eroticised” (vii).

**(d) Facilitating cross-cultural exchange and international collaboration between UK-based cultural practitioners and Turkey-based artists through UK-based projects:**

Çakırlar facilitated and delivered collaborative work between Turkey-based artists and UK-based cultural practitioners including Queer Art Projects (London), Broadway Cinema (Nottingham), New Art Exchange (Nottingham), Nottingham Contemporary and Primary (Nottingham). In September-October 2018, Çakırlar was official collaborator and the public programme curator for [House of Wisdom Nottingham](#), an arts project funded by Art Council England and made possible by collaboration with Istanbul-based curators [Collective Çukurcuma](#), London-based producers [Queer Art Projects](#), and Nottingham-based cultural organisations: Primary (an independent Nottingham-based arts collective with public access its core tenet), Bromley House Library, Five Leaves Bookshop, UNESCO City of Literature Nottingham, and Bonington Gallery. Focusing on libraries, censorship and alternative spaces of knowledge production in Turkey and the wider Middle East, the exhibition hosted 44 artworks by 40 artists. The public programme Çakırlar curated included lectures, talks, workshops, performances and the screening of films by international artists with Turkish and Middle Eastern backgrounds and affinities. It engaged local cultural practitioners, forged a cross-cultural dialogue on censorship and cultural dissidence, and generated ideas for new spaces for knowledge production. Complicating dominant perceptions of Turkey and the wider Middle East, public programme events focused on “the

artistic agency of dissident knowledge-producers rather than adopting familiar narratives of oppression and victimization” (viii). Audiences welcomed the programme as “thought-provoking”, “accessible”, “inspiring” and “multi-disciplinary” (Source xi). Video documentation of all public events is fully accessible online (please visit Collective Çukurcuma’s [webpage.](#)) which significantly enhanced the global reach of the project: Online material was watched 7,960 times in 50 countries (xii). Subsequently, Çakırlar was invited to author a reflective essay for [Asia Dialogue](#) edited by Asia Research Institute (Nottingham, UK), which focused on the project’s production and his experience of curating the public programme. It was reprinted by contemporary art organisation [Framer Framed](#) (Amsterdam Netherlands), which further enhanced [House of Wisdom Nottingham](#)’s global reach via international platforms for critical debate on censorship and contemporary Middle Eastern politics. Çakırlar has since continued his collaboration with Primary by facilitating dialogue between local audiences and Primary’s international artists in residence. As its director Niki Russell states, Çakırlar’s work “has made a significant contribution to [Primary’s] core mission and public programme by enabling cross-cultural dialogues between local and international cultural practitioners, and domestic art audiences ... [and] shap[ing] local audiences’ perceptions and understandings of global identity politics in arts and culture” (viii).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- i. Testimonial letter, Professor Sibel Yardımcı, Head of the Centre for Women’s Studies, Department of Sociology, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul, Turkey.
- ii. Testimonial letter, Nicholas Olney, Managing Director, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York City, USA
- iii. Testimonial letter, Naz Cuguoğlu, Projects Manager, Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey and Berlin, Germany.
- iv. Testimonial letter, Emre Baykal, Chief Curator, ARTER – Space for Art, Istanbul, Turkey.
- v. Testimonial letter, Berfu Şeker, Advocacy Officer, Women for Women’s Human Rights WWHR – New Ways, Istanbul, Turkey.
- vi. Testimonial letter, Başak Durgun, Assistant Professor, Global and Intercultural Studies, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA.
- vii. Testimonial letter, Suela J. Cennet, Founder and Executive Director, The Pill, Contemporary Art, Istanbul, Turkey.
- viii. Testimonial letter, Niki Russell, Director, Primary, Nottingham, UK.
- ix. Extended reviews published on Turkish broadsheet newspapers on both *Cinsellik Muammasi* (2012) and the translation of Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* (2014). For examples, please see the following newspaper reviews [1] [2] [3] [4] the following reviews published on the official website of the Ankara-based LGBT activist organization KaosGL [5]
- x. Michael Erdman, Curator, Turkish and Turkic Collections, British Library, London, UK: <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2017/06/a-rainbow-in-stormy-skies-lgbt-writing-in-the-northern-middle-east.html>
- xi. House of Wisdom Nottingham, public programme events – Audience Surveys
- xii. House of Wisdom Nottingham, public programme events – video documentation - Vimeo Statistics



8 May 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is intended to serve as a testimonial to Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar's remarkable contribution to the development of the field of gender/sexuality studies in Turkey, and a concomitant and growing public awareness on LGBT+ issues in the country, both at institutional and individual levels. Çakırlar's work includes a wide range of efforts from teaching, through editing and translation, to film/arts criticism across a variety of contexts. Its impact is therefore not limited to the period where Çakırlar had taught at two prominent universities of Turkey (Boğaziçi University and Istanbul Bilgi University, 2009-2012), but extends far beyond to reach out to different national contexts (UK, US) and continues to fuel both a scholarly critical discourse, and an awareness and engagement shared by younger generations of students and activists.

I have followed Çakırlar's work for almost a decade now, as a colleague, and a member of the Department of Sociology, affiliated with the Center for Women's Studies, in Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. Our department provides an interdisciplinary research environment, offering courses on urban sociology, sociology of culture and arts, film studies, gender, queer and disability studies only to name a few fields (80-100 new students are enrolled each year at undergraduate level, and another 20-30 at postgraduate). I find it worth mentioning that the Department of Sociology at Mimar Sinan University still counts among the few 'hubs' that keep a cutting edge and critical approach within the Turkish academia that has been crushed under the political pressure of the current government. It is thus a center of attraction for a generation of young scholars and postgraduate students, and provides many opportunities to observe the latter group's theoretical and practical inclinations. In my opinion, more recent threads such as queer studies, post-colonial feminism, post-humanism, and science and technology studies are constant sources of enthusiasm for the younger generation of scholars in the country, especially when these fields are explored in relation to arts and activism (these two being intertwined in many instances).

Within such a context, I believe Çakırlar's work constitutes a pivotal moment in the encounter of the Turkish-reading audience with such literature. Especially because the language of education is Turkish in our department, and the majority of students do not feel comfortable reading in other languages, I have had many opportunities to observe the significance of translating contemporary critical theory. Çakırlar's translation of Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993), namely *Bela Bedenler* (2014), was a keystone in this sense. Additionally, the 2012 volume *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet* [*The Sexuality Conundrum: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Contemporary Turkey*] he co-edited with Dr. Serkan Delice (UAL), provided a comprehensive overview of the field of queer studies as read, understood, and included in original academic studies practiced in/on Turkey. Together with only a few other edited volumes (such as the *Queer Tahayyül* co-edited by myself, or the special issue of the academic journal *Cogito*), Çakırlar's work played an active and crucial part in the ways in which this 'generation' of critical scholarship allowed the reshaping of the higher education curriculum, especially in the case of gender/sexuality studies, or more generally, critical/cultural studies. To give a couple of examples, among the modules taught in our department, SOS331: Identity, Body, Power I, SOS332: Identity, Body, Power II, SOS348 Gender and Identity, SOS350 Society and Cinema are undergraduate courses which include Çakırlar's work including *Cinsellik Muamması* and the translation *Bela Bedenler*. Similarly, in modules taught at postgraduate level, SOS531 Historical Perspectives in Gender and Women's Studies, SOS538 Gender Studies, SOS625 Contemporary Debates in Sociology I and SOS626 Contemporary Debates in Sociology II, students are encouraged to engage with Çakırlar's work.

Yet, I also believe that the impact of these publications was not limited to the academy. Both young scholars and activists who had the opportunity to get familiar with the issues and approaches developed in queer studies through an encounter with the work of Çakırlar and others started to change the public discourse around questions related to gender, sexuality, and LGBT+ politics. The increasing visibility of such questions during the Gezi uprising of 2013, and the way these questions started to be asked and investigated in non-binary terms, can, I believe, also be regarded as a less immediate impact of the introduction of queer studies in Turkey.

As I mentioned above, another trend I had the opportunity to observe was the interest young scholars and activists had in contemporary art practices, or vice versa: Increasing number of artists started to combine their aesthetic practices with theoretical, philosophical and scholarly readings, research and trends, creating a hybrid field of theory-arts-activism in Turkey. I believe Çakırlar's work, including his collaborations with various international art galleries (including his scholarly contributions to the exhibition catalogues *Taner Ceylan: Lost Paintings* (2013), *Jake and Dinos Chapman: In the Realm of Senseless*

(2017), and *Erinç Seymen: Homo Fragilis* (2017)), also constituted a timely and influential intervention in this sense. In my opinion, these scholarly contributions, which lay at the intersection of queer theory and its exploration through arts, are strong examples that demonstrate the impact of akırlar’s work in reaching wider audiences and contributing to public discourse.

In summary, I firmly believe that akırlar’s work has had a significantly strong impact in its contribution to the higher education curriculum in Turkey (and beyond), to the public awareness of LGBT+ issues, and to the public visibility of contemporary art practices in the country.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Sibel Yardımcı  
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# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

To Whom It May Concern:

## Letter of Reference for Dr Cüneyt Çakırlar

Paul Kasmin Gallery is committed to supporting an ongoing intellectual and cultural dialogue with influential modern and contemporary artists, and representing several generations of internationally recognized contemporary artists working in a variety of media. In addition to years of cultivating the careers of artists, including Walton Ford, Robert Indiana, Nyoman Masriadi, Taner Ceylan and Iván Navarro, Paul Kasmin Gallery also specializes in representing artist estates (such as those of Lee Krasner, Constantin Brancusi, William N. Copley, Simon Hantai, François-Xavier Lalanne and Morris Louis). Since its inception in 1989, the gallery has presented a program of exceptional solo exhibitions and dynamic group shows. The gallery publishes a variety of catalogues and monographs, and participates in international art fairs and frequently presents public art projects. The gallery is dedicated to furthering academic research engaged with its artists and their oeuvres.

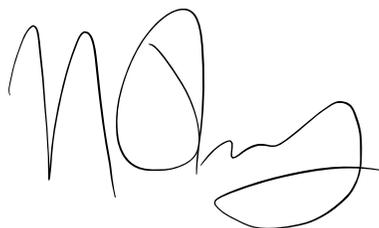
The Istanbul-based painter Taner Ceylan has been a central artist in Paul Kasmin Gallery's program since 2012. Ceylan is among the most important and influential contemporary voices in Turkey and the greater region, whose ground-breaking and at times controversial works have combined an academic investigation into Turkey's modern history with singular vision and technical mastery of his painting medium. The gallery has hosted three solo shows *The Lost Paintings Series* (2013), *We Now Must Say Goodbye* (2015), *Latest Works from the Golden Age* (2017) and has worked to include Mr. Ceylan in institutional group exhibitions, biennials, and international art fairs.

Accompanying the opening of *The Lost Paintings Series* exhibition (2013), the gallery co-published with Damiani a monograph on this critical body of work in Taner Ceylan's oeuvre. For this book, Damiani and the gallery commissioned Dr Cüneyt Çakırlar to co-author the anchor text and to write a rigorous analysis of each artwork in the series. Çakırlar's original scholarship provided an in-depth discussion of Ceylan's practice, that contextualized the artist's innovative exploration of alternative and hidden histories of the Middle East, by paying particular attention to issues of queer aesthetics and cross-

# PAUL KASMIN GALLERY

cultural translation in contemporary arts, and to the representational politics of gender and sexuality. Çakırlar's writing in this monograph has been an important piece of research that contributed to the global intelligibility and visibility of these alternative histories Ceylan explored in his paintings; and it continues to improve critical understandings of the Middle East in general and Turkey in particular. This book, distributed in English throughout the US and Europe, has helped to build awareness of the artist's voice internationally, and has also helped build a greater understanding of non-western cultural histories by providing a crucial contribution to the contemporary dialogues involving LGBTQ artists outside of the US and Europe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'NOlney', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nicholas Olney

Managing Director

# ZILBERMAN GALLERY

I S T A N B U L | B E R L I N

[zilbermangallery.com](http://zilbermangallery.com)

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30 May 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write this letter on behalf of Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar. I had the opportunity to work with Çakırlar for the article he was commissioned to author in the catalogue of Erinç Seymen's solo exhibition titled *Homo Fragilis*, which was on show from 13/09/2017 to 4/11/2017 at Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey.

Zilberman Gallery was founded in Istanbul in 2008. Its aim is twofold: to promote contemporary artists from Turkey internationally and to introduce international artists to the local art scene in Turkey. The gallery stages 10-12 exhibitions in a year at its main gallery and project space. It is located at the heart of Istanbul's cultural center, Beyoğlu, and occupies two separate floors of Mısır Apartment, one of the most famous examples of art nouveau architecture in Istanbul, designed in 1910 by Ottoman Armenian architect Hovsep Aznavur. In 2016, Zilberman Gallery opened a new space in Berlin (Germany) that includes both a gallery and an artist-in-residency program.

Zilberman Gallery represents artists from Turkey such as Extrastruggle/Extramücadele, Didem Erk and Erinç Seymen, whose art practices explore the complex ideological operations of militarism, nationalism and gender/sexuality politics in Turkey through critically engaging with local and global movements of contemporary visual arts. The gallery also represents internationally acclaimed artists, including Walid Siti, Pedro Gómez-Egaña, Simon Wachsmuth, and Heba Y. Amin, who participated in international biennials all around the world, such as Documenta, Istanbul Biennial, Berlin Biennial, Sharjah Biennial, and Venice Biennial, to name a few. The gallery has a strong presence at international art fairs, forging close relationships with collectors, curators and art professionals, and creating opportunities for gallery artists in cities including Miami, Hong Kong, Vienna, Dubai, and Düsseldorf. With the firm belief that a commercial gallery should also assume its social responsibility of education and audience development, Zilberman Gallery not only organizes artist talks, lecture performances, book launches, and round table discussions, but also publishes open-access exhibition catalogues that attempt to contribute to regional and global debates on arts and politics with commissioned articles from leading scholars and experts in the corresponding fields of art history, contemporary art criticism and cultural/critical studies. In line with the gallery's ambitions, Çakırlar's commissioned scholarly contribution to Erinç Seymen's *Homo Fragilis* in 2017 has provided a crucial public platform for debating practices of LGBTQ dissidence and exploring the public visibility and cross-cultural mobility of LGBTQ art practices.

As one of the most prominent LGBTQ artists based in Turkey, Erinç Seymen's work looks at power relationships, and use metaphors and anthropomorphic forms which coalesce to create a narrative that directly critiques and curtails modern and traditional ideologies of militarism, nationalism, colonialism, hegemonic masculinity and hetero-normativity—especially visible in his show *Homo Fragilis* (2017). He cynically deals with the controversy and asymmetry stemming from the discrepancies in intentions, tracing the permanent impact of devotedness, shared values and the cultures of belonging.

Acknowledging the ground-breaking work Çakırlar has produced in collaboration with the leading local LGBTQ practitioners in media, arts and activism (2012; 2013; 2015; 2017), the gallery team agreed that his scholarship would provide an invaluable contribution to Seymen's exhibition *Homo Fragilis* (2017) by introducing the artist's vision to wider audiences. Çakırlar authored a 5000-word piece in English, titled "The Non-Ameliorative Art: Erinç Seymen's Detached Scenes of Cruel Optimism", and then translated the piece into Turkish. Both the original piece and its Turkish translation is published as part of the catalogue [[open access link](#)]. Informed by contemporary debates on hospitality, attachment and gender/sexuality politics in the field of queer theory, Çakırlar's piece provided a very original analytical account of each art work exhibited in *Homo Fragilis*. Working with the artist closely, Çakırlar's piece also offered an engaged commentary on the conceptual and curatorial framework of the exhibition.

I strongly believe that Çakırlar's contribution to *Homo Fragilis* is of utmost importance regarding the reach and the reception of queer arts in the context of Turkey. Given the increasing political pressure the LGBTQ community has been experiencing in the country, these modes of artistic and scholarly productions in the field of contemporary visual arts gains even more importance, to make it reach wider non-academic audiences. Having witnessed the positive feedback from the community of artists and curators, I can say that Çakırlar's input has been very important. At the same time, bringing this catalogue to international art fairs (including Art Dubai, Vienna Contemporary, Art Brussels, and Contemporary Istanbul), and mailing them to libraries of different international art museums (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul Modern Museum, to name a few), I can say that this article also received much positive feedback by contributing to the contemporary debates on the Middle Eastern cultural practices among members of different international art communities.

I believe Dr Çakırlar's contribution will keep on inspiring and empowering both the local and international LGBTQ communities, and also the wider community of art practitioners. Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [naz@zilbermangallery.com](mailto:naz@zilbermangallery.com) or on +905363398977.

Your sincerely,

Naz Cuguoglu  
Projects Manager  
Zilberman Gallery



To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this testimonial letter for Cüneyt Çakırlar in my capacity as the chief curator of Arter – space for art (Istanbul, Turkey).

An initiative of the Vehbi Koç Foundation (VKF), Arter was opened in 2010 to offer a sustainable infrastructure for producing and exhibiting contemporary art in Turkey. Since its inauguration, Arter has been presenting solo and group exhibitions with the aim of providing a platform of visibility for artistic practices and encouraging production of contemporary artworks. Arter also features publications that accompany each exhibition as part of its educational programme, which includes guided tours, artist talks, lectures, debates, and screenings. Following the success it has achieved since its inauguration, Arter is now in a transition process towards becoming a museum and will move to its new premises in Istanbul's Dolapdere district in 2019. Designed by Grimshaw Architects (London), and conceptualised as a multidisciplinary cultural and educational hub, the museum will feature exhibitions from (but not limited to) the Vehbi Koç Foundation Contemporary Art Collection and multi-disciplinary events throughout the year.

We are also proud to collaborate with writers, art historians, social scientists, and academics from various fields in the context of our educational activities. In 2017, we have invited Cüneyt Çakırlar to contribute to the British duo Jake & Dinos Chapman's retrospective show in Istanbul, "In the Realm of the Senseless" (10 February - 7 May 2017), by commissioning an essay for the exhibition book and an exhibition tour. Bringing together a significant number of works from the duo's iconic series such as "Hell" (1999), "The Chapman Family Collection" (2002), "Insult to Injury" (2003-2004), "Fucking Hell" (2008) and "One Day You Will No Longer Be Loved" (2010), alongside their new and rarely seen works including "Shitrospective" (2013) and "Come and See" (2014), the retrospective "In the Realm of the Senseless" was one of our most attended exhibitions, opening up creative and inspiring public debates on contemporary culture in the local context of Turkey.

Cüneyt Çakırlar's essay, titled "Aesthetic Inertia, Bathetic Death: On the Profoundly Banal Art of Jake and Dinos Chapman", explored the work of

the Chapman brothers through their performative use of violence, exposure, death and mimicry, by also addressing the ways in which they developed their aesthetic strategies throughout their career. Informed by a rich selection of pre-existing global debates on art history, contemporary visual arts, queer theory and cultural studies, Çakırlar's highly original and analytically rigorous contribution was invaluable for the reception of the Chapmans' work from a critical perspective. The essay was published in both English and Turkish, along with the scholarly contributions from Jake Chapman and the exhibition curator Nick Hackworth.

The book was printed in 1.500 copies. 450 copies of the book were presented to our opening guests, 525 copies were sold at Arter and bookstores, 30 copies were sent free of charge to the university libraries in Turkey, and 170 copies were sent as a gift to major international art institutions worldwide.

Besides his contribution to the book, the exhibition tour Cüneyt Çakırlar delivered on [10 February 2017](#) after the opening, which I also had the chance to attend, received a considerable attention both from the academic circles and art lovers. Cüneyt Çakırlar's interpretation of the Chapman brothers' works offered us an in-depth understanding of the duo's approach and oeuvre.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Emre Baykal  
Chief Curator  
ARTER – space for art  
İstiklal Cad. No:211  
Beyoglu 34433 Istanbul TR

To whom it may concern,

I have met Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar, when I was a graduate student in Critical and Cultural Studies MA Programme at Boğaziçi University (Istanbul, Turkey). As a self-identified feminist with an undergraduate degree in Cinema and Film Production, I was eager to practice research on issues of gender, sexuality and representation. I had read some studies on queer theory, and was very passionate about LGBTQ issues, but at the time in Turkey, access to academic resources and translated materials on queer theory was very limited as was the number of researchers and scholars studying in this field. For this reason, I was thrilled to see Çakırlar's modules "Queer Aesthetics and Contemporary Film" and "Film, Ethics, Erotics" among the elective modules provided for my course (2010-2012), and I enrolled in both these modules with great enthusiasm.

Informed by his ongoing research practice, Çakırlar's lectures adopted an intersectional approach, which focused on cross-cultural mobility of LGBTQ practices and problematized the "cultural translation of queer practice" while critically engaging with the discourses on globalization of these practices and identities. In connection to this intersectional approach, he did not only use theoretical texts to encourage critical thinking, but also engage with films and contemporary visual art practices as images of thought. His teaching and research inspired the young generation of academics and activists in Turkey not with a top-down pedagogic agenda that provides them with a diverse set of LGBTQ cultural practices but with a critical and methodological vision that was attentive to the local and global ideological operations of knowledge production in the field of gender/sexuality studies.

Çakırlar's work played a key role in initiating and furthering queer scholarly work in Turkey. In 2012, he published *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet*, co-edited with Serkan Delice, which is the first extensive collection of studies on cultures of sexual dissidence in contemporary Turkey. The volume interrogates the hegemonic discourses on the cross-cultural circulation and adoption of western LGBTQ concepts in its intersections with local practices. *Cinsellik Muamması* has filled in a gap on how to theoretically engage with non-heteronormative sexualities and identities in Turkey without being restricted into the dualistic discourses on Western/Eastern modes of identity production, and it has contributed greatly to the local LGBTQ literature as it paved the way for new projects which focuses on local sexual cultures. Being one of the few projects that specifically questions cross-cultural translation of



LGBTQ concepts within the Turkish context, this collection has provided a unique tool for researchers, lecturers and students in higher education who are interested in gender and sexuality studies.

Çakırlar's another key contribution to queer literature in Turkey, is the 2014 translation of Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993). As mentioned above, there has been a huge gap in queer literature in the Turkish context, both in terms of original content production and in terms of translation of the main resources into Turkish. From 2013 and onwards, publications on queer theory and major theoretical texts have been gradually increasing, however there is still a shortfall in translated texts. I believe one of the reasons why the discussions on queer theory have started very late in Turkey, is rooted in this lack of translation as sometimes language might present a big barrier for accessing theoretical frameworks in non-Western societies. Hence, Çakırlar's translation of Butler's *Bodies That Matter* in 2014, which is one of the foundational books in queer studies, made a huge contribution in making a key source accessible to many scholars, researchers, students and activists in Turkey.

The inspiration stemming from Çakırlar's work was also conveyed to the realm of activism, in which me and several of his students were engaged. As I was being taught by Çakırlar, I was already a member of Amargi, an independent, autonomous feminist organization and I started to engage with Lambdaistanbul, which is also an autonomous, grassroots LGBTQ organization based in Istanbul. Several of Çakırlar's other students were also active in Lambdaistanbul, and as a group, we started conversations on queer theory within the organization. As an outcome, several workshops were held internally, and an autonomous queer feminist/transgender network was established.

As an activist, I have always aimed to share the theoretical and methodological framework I acquired from Çakırlar's work on queer theory and visual cultures with wider feminist, LGBTQ and other civil society networks with an intention to blur the boundaries between academia and activism. I attended several workshops and panels as a speaker such as the "Queer?" workshop at International Filmmor Women's Film Festival in 2011 and the roundtable "From Experience to Action: Gender Trouble" at Diyarbakır Arts Center's "Women and LGBTQ" event in 2012. I also attended a workshop to deliver a talk on sexuality and non-heteronormative filmic representation of the female desire at the "Amargi Feminism Discussions" in 2012. As a group of activists, we also organized LGBTQ film screenings at Lambdaistanbul, in which we invited Dr. Çakırlar to conduct a workshop on Derek Jarman's *Blue* in





2014. *Blue* was questioning the complex relationships between intimacy, death, illness, sexuality, and mourning while juxtaposing visual image and sound in an unconventional way. I believe that these discussions, which have been taking place from 2010 to date, influenced a new generation of *artists* (activists who use art as a form of political resistance) who further explore what these concepts mean for the LGBTQ movement in Turkey - which has been going through tough times facing severe death, loss, criminalization and prohibition in the recent years.

The insight and inspiration of Dr. Çakırlar's intellectual endeavours crystallized into another project that I am involved in. Since 2012, I am on the advisory board of "Queer Düş'ün Series" (publisher: Sel Yayıncılık, Istanbul). The main ambition of this book series is to contribute to the local growth of literature on queer theory and make the local queer practices visible – either by translating significant theoretical texts into Turkish or publishing collections of essays focusing on local LGBTQ practices. The work of Virginie Despantes, Sarah Ahmed, Monique Wittig and Jack Halberstam are among some that were translated under this series (2013-2017). Additionally, three edited volumes (one of which Çakırlar had also contributed to) were published within the scope of this project, focusing on and bringing local gendered and sexual subjectivities under the spotlight of intellectual reception (2013; 2014; 2016).

All these endeavours have also shaped my career plans and I wanted to work professionally on gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ activism. I have been working in a feminist organization, Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways (WWHR) as the Advocacy Officer for around two years. Given my interest in research focusing on gender and sexuality, I have chosen to work in this organization which combines various methods and tools in feminist knowledge production such as action-research, publications, training, influencing decision making and policy development mechanisms, creating pressure groups and advocacy. As one of the few organizations in Turkey, which aims to link, local, regional and global levels of activism and knowledge production, WWHR is the member and co-founder of several global and regional networks. One of them is the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR), a coalition which consists of feminist and LGBTQ organizations, researchers and academics based in MENA, Central & South East Asia. Another one is the network of Global South Women's Forum which is a platform in which the feminists from the Global South, discuss the context specific challenges as well as the mushrooming of state-led attacks on gender identity and sexual autonomy of women and LGBTQs at a regional and global basis. With this position, I have seized the unique

opportunity to be introduced to diverse LGBTQ cultures in various contexts. Given my previous background, my efforts are to insert the local, regional and global LGBTQ and queer agendas into different programs that WWHR implements, and try to form the links between local, regional and global practices of queerness, and bring the Global South issues into the discussions of rights-based activism which is predominantly West-oriented.

Çakırlar's scholarly work has had an important role on framing gender, sexuality, research and activism in Turkey. His contribution has been transformative, and had a direct and significant impact on different institutional levels. His lectures, being the first lectures on queer theory in Turkey, has paved the way for subsequent queer theory classes, the publications on queer theory has proliferated, activists taking his courses has become NGO workers or researchers who try to insert queer agenda and methodology within their relevant programs and institutions. His lectures and publications hence had a snow-ball effect, which has enriched discussions on LGBTQ activism in Turkey.

Cüneyt Çakırlar's work has had a significant influence on the careers of many of his former students (including me) within and beyond academia. I hope this testimonial letter also sheds some light on the invaluable contributions the work of Çakırlar (as a scholar, researcher, teacher, and mentor) have made to the formation of gender/sexuality studies in Turkey's higher education sector, and to the public awareness of LGBTQ issues in the country.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Berfu Şeker

Advocacy Officer

**Kadının İnsan Hakları - Yeni Çözümler Derneği**  
**Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) - New Ways**  
inönü Cad. Saadet Apt. No: 29/6 34437 Gümüşsuyu İstanbul



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Nottingham Trent University  
School of Arts and Humanities  
Clifton Lane  
Nottingham NG11 8NS  
United Kingdom

January 12, 2020

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am delighted to write this letter of testimony on behalf of Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar who has been my mentor for nearly a decade. I am Assistant Professor in American Studies and Global and Intercultural Studies at Miami University. I met Cüneyt in September 2010 upon enrolling in his module *CULT565: Gender, Queer and the Body in Aesthetic Expression* during my first term as a graduate student in the MA program in Cultural Studies at Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey. Following this module, Cüneyt became a close mentor, and he has been instrumental in the development and completion of my MA thesis, titled *Subjectivity and Politics of Women-Loving-Women in Istanbul*, as well as the continuation of my academic career through my Ph.D. studies in the U.S.A. Over the years, I have witnessed Cüneyt's unparalleled constructive influence in the lives of fellow scholar-activists through his teaching and mentorship. Moreover, I observed closely how his published works have translated and transformed queer studies within the Turkish academic and political discourse. Cüneyt's intellect and generosity continue to guide me in my academic career, and I enthusiastically endorse his role as an educator and a researcher.

*Gender, Queer and the Body in Aesthetic Expression* was a module that created an intellectual exchange with graduate students who were interested in queer theory, contemporary philosophy of aesthetics, LGBTQ performance in film, video and visual arts. Focusing on the intersections and interactions between sexual dissidence, performance/performativity, and contemporary aesthetic practices (including film, documentary and contemporary arts), this module effectively demonstrated how to critically engage with debates of queer scholarship in international and cross-cultural frameworks. This outstandingly curated module and Cüneyt's dedication to critical interdisciplinary knowledge-building, which crosses the conventional boundaries between academia, politics/activism, social sciences, and arts, was inspirational to many students in the class. As the first queer studies module taught in Turkey, *Gender, Queer and the Body in Aesthetic Expression* contributed to the national higher education curriculum by opening up a new avenue for critical research praxis in sexuality studies, broadly defined (2010-2013). Moreover, it provided the foundation for my thesis inquiry into the subjectivity of queer women in Istanbul, an interdisciplinary research focusing on relationships with community, and identity politics in order to develop a vibrant sensibility, an active discursive realm that continuously interrogates heterosexual hegemony, with oral histories taking a primary role. Cüneyt acted as the internal assessor for my MA dissertation which became a considerably strong asset I relied on in my application for a PhD degree at George Mason University (2013). During the early years of my PhD studies (2013-2017), I worked as a teaching fellow and taught various modules in cultural studies at George Mason. During these years, I benefited tremendously from Cüneyt's academic mentorship and from my experience of his research-informed interdisciplinary

teaching practice at Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey. His publications (in both English and Turkish) that explores the cross-cultural mobility/translation of queer cultural practices (Çakırlar 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2017; 2018) clearly reflects the vision and the method he adopted in his teaching in Turkey.

I hope to have clarified Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar's influence not only in my academic career but also in the larger field of sexuality studies and LGBTQ activism in Turkey. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Başak Durgun

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Başak Durgun', with a stylized, flowing script.

Assistant Professor  
American Studies and Global & Intercultural Studies  
Miami University  
[durgunb@miamioh.edu](mailto:durgunb@miamioh.edu)

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17 January 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to write this letter on behalf of Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar. I had the opportunity to work with Çakırlar for the essay he was commissioned to author for our artist Soufiane Ababri's solo exhibition titled *Memories of a Solitary Cruise* (10/01/19- 23/02/19) at the gallery The Pill®, Istanbul, Turkey.

Located in an ancient generator factory, The Pill® is an international contemporary art gallery based in the historical peninsula of Istanbul by the Golden Horn. Founded in 2015 and launched in January 2016, the gallery operates as a global platform that brings together local and international artists. Initially imagined as a mobile naval project space by its founder, it aims to create a fertile environment for multi-disciplinary contemporary art practices, to increase the Turkish art scene's visibility and enable a relevant dialogue within the local context by enhancing collaborations with other institutions in the region and inviting international artists to reflect on their practice while experimenting through a new territory of contemporary art production. Since its opening, the gallery has achieved to establish itself as one of the most influential players in the region. With focus on site-specific practices in contemporary arts, the gallery curated shows from cutting-edge, emerging and established artists from Turkey and beyond, including Leyla Gediz, Eva Nielsen, Marion Verboom, Deniz Gul, Ugo Shiavi, Ferhat Özgür, Apolonia Sokol, Mina Bozorgmehr & Hadi Moghadam and Elsa Sahal.

# THE PILL®

The French-Moroccan artist Soufiane Ababri has exhibited in various institutions in France and worldwide including the solo shows *Here is A Strange and Bitter Crop*, [space] and Fluxus Art Projects, London, UK (2018), *Haunted Lives*, Galerie Praz-Delavallade, Paris, France (2018), *Oh please! Don't be angry! It's based on emotional facts*, Eternal Network, Tours, France (2017) and *What's the name of the nation*, Le Cube indépendant Art Room, Rabat, Morocco (2015). His work is included in the collections of the MAC/VAL and the FRAC Pointou-Charentes. Ababri is one of the most prominent post-colonial LGBTQ artists in the contemporary art scene. Exploring the racialisation-sexualisation of non-Western and migrant masculinities, the cultural/aesthetic canons of Orientalism, queers-of-colour critique and contemporary queer arts, Ababri's art practice operates at the intersections of cultural politics, homoeroticism and neo-colonialism. Inspired by the figure of the Turkish wrestlers, Ababri's show in Istanbul, titled *Memories of a Solitary Cruise*, provides a critical commentary on the stereotypes of Oriental masculinities.

Being familiar with the pioneering work Çakırlar has produced in the fields of transnational sexuality studies and global queer arts, the gallery team agreed that he would be one of the most suitable scholars who would introduce Soufiane Ababri's work to art enthusiasts and wider audiences in Turkey. Çakırlar authored a comprehensive study on Ababri's work, that explores how his solo show at The PILL relates to the artist's previous artworks. The piece titled "Pink Cheeks, Brown Shades: Soufiane Ababri's Queer Eroticism" is published, in English, on the gallery's [website](#). The Turkish translation is published in [Manifold](#), a Turkey-based online journal that publishes essays on design, technology, architecture and contemporary arts. The copies of both versions of Çakırlar's piece is being used as an on-site introductory material circulated during the exhibition - available to all audiences visiting the show. Nearly 200 people (among which there were artists, curators and cultural practitioners from Istanbul and abroad) attended the opening which took place on 10 January 2019. The gallery team received very positive feedback on the show from audiences who also emphasised how Çakırlar's piece contributed to their experience of Ababri's work in demonstrating the ways in which the artist is using cross-cultural references to different canons of modern art, and in highlighting how the artist exposes the ideological dimensions of how particular bodies from particular geographies are eroticised.

I strongly believe that Cüneyt Çakırlar's scholarly contribution to Soufiane Ababri's show at The Pill is a strong example of the impact his research practice has on facilitating the global visibility and mobility of contemporary artists across geographies, and making these art practices reach wider audiences. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Suela J. Cennet, Founder & Executive Director of The Pill, Contemporary Art.  
suela@thepill.co



# PRIMARY

31 January 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I'm pleased to write this testimonial letter on behalf of Dr. Cüneyt Çakırlar. I met Cüneyt when he introduced the project House of Wisdom Nottingham to the Primary team and facilitated the collaboration between Queer Art Projects (London, UK), Collective Çukurcuma (Istanbul, Turkey) and Nottingham Trent University (Nottingham, UK) in 2018. This letter is to elaborate how Cüneyt has made a significant contribution to our core mission and public programme by enabling cross-cultural dialogues between local and international cultural practitioners, and domestic art audiences.

Primary creates an open environment for artistic research and production through the provision of studio and workshop spaces, and an innovative public programme. It was initiated by artists wishing to create an organisation that placed artistic research and production as a public process at the core of its work. Opened in March 2012, Primary was set up by Nottingham Studios Ltd, an artist-focused not-for-profit organisation established as a registered charity in 2006. With support from Nottingham City Council, Arts Council England and Foyle Foundation, Primary has transformed a Grade II listed building in an inner-city area of Nottingham into a new cultural resource. Our building provides working spaces for over 40 artists from a broad range of critically engaged visual arts practice. We offer studio spaces within an engaged and outward-looking artistic community that supports resident artists to experiment and develop their practices. Our public programme was initiated in March 2014 encompassing artist commissions both within and outside the building, production residencies, exhibitions, talks and workshops, which explore new ways for local and international audiences to engage with contemporary art. The programme takes a unique position, focussing on production – offering artists the freedom to take risks and experiment with new work. The proposal for House of Wisdom Nottingham was strongly resonating with Primary's local mission in Nottingham, and we accepted to act as one of the project's regional collaborators. Our engagement curator Rebecca Beinart agreed to work closely with the project team, including Cüneyt as the exhibition's public programme curator.

Curated by the Istanbul-based Collective Çukurcuma, House of Wisdom explores the political power of books and libraries in our century. The project was presented as a traveling exhibition, in the form of a library, that explores the increasing levels of censorship on information and the current socio-political situation in and around Turkey. Accommodating 44 artworks from 40 artists, the exhibition started its journey in Dzialdov (Berlin) in April 2017, and then moved to Istanbul as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Biennial's public program (16 September – 12 November 2017). It was also on display at the art space Framer Framed in Amsterdam, as part of Amsterdam Art Weekend 2017 programme (25 November 2017 – 7 January 2018). Following the exhibition in Amsterdam, Cüneyt joined the team and facilitated the network of collaborators in Nottingham and London. As a result, the 4<sup>th</sup> iteration of House of Wisdom was sponsored by Arts Council England, and produced by Queer Art Projects (London, UK) in collaboration with Nottingham-based venues, institutions, and organisations including Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University, Primary, [Bromley House Library](#), [Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature](#), and [Five Leaves Bookshop](#).

House of Wisdom Nottingham was launched by Primary on 29 June 2018 with a panel titled "House of Wisdom: Cross-cultural Mobility and Post-Gallery Curatorial Practice". Organised and chaired by Cüneyt, the event hosted the project's co-curator Mine Kaplangı (Istanbul, Turkey) and House of Wisdom's contributing artists Işıl Eğrikavuk (Berlin, Germany) and Istanbul Queer Art Collective (Istanbul, Turkey and London, UK). Aiming to enhance the existing connections with the local arts scene before the actual exhibition launched in Nottingham, the panel was attended by key Nottingham-based practitioners including the public programming team of Nottingham Contemporary. Questioning dominant perceptions of Turkey and the wider Middle East, the panel focused on the ways in which House of Wisdom represents and mobilises artistic agencies of dissident cultural producers in the region (including LGBTQ and feminist art practices) rather than adopting familiar narratives of oppression and victimization.

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[WWW.WEAREPRIMARY.ORG](http://WWW.WEAREPRIMARY.ORG)

# PRIMARY

The public programme Cüneyt had curated (27 September – 27 October 2019) has focused on active agents of dissidence rather than victims of political oppression. Scattered across various venues in Nottingham, the programme of events introduced to local audiences an unconventional ensemble of critical artistic practices from Turkey and its diasporas, investing in curatorial, cultural, aesthetic and postcolonial interventions. Part of this programme's contributors, Berlin-based curator Misal Adnan Yıldız presented a talk at Primary (10 October 2019) based on his curatorial project *Mutterzunge*, exploring the politics of language through living documents of grief, trauma, war, migration/exile and psychology of change across different artistic perspectives. This multi-venue project is composed of several stages of content development, and engages in conversations with a novella of the same name by Berlin-based, Turkey-born author and the 1991 Ingeborg Bachmann Prize winner, *Emine Sevgi Özdamar*. Presenting new productions from *Mutterzunge*'s Berlin programme, Yıldız's talk looked at recent artworks by Şener Özmen, Mehtap Baydu, Mohammad Salemy among others, engaging with critical questions on how to narrate social changes within personal and social traumas. Through Cüneyt's conversation with Yıldız, the event has also elaborated on the issues both projects *Mutterzunge* and *House of Wisdom* shared with reference to their engagement with geopolitics of representation (with emphasis on Turkey and the wider Middle East), and local/global operations of contemporary art practices. The event further helped local audiences and practitioners gain a nuanced understanding of *House of Wisdom Nottingham* and its engagement with geography, identity politics, and cultures of dissidence.

Following *House of Wisdom*, Cüneyt has recently been invited by Primary to contribute to its public programme (October 2019). In response to our brief, he designed an event in conversation with the Egyptian-American artist Ibrahim Ahmed for his solo exhibition at Primary, titled *Does Anybody Leave Heaven?* (27 September – 24 October 2019). As an output of his residency with New Art Exchange in Nottingham, Ahmed's solo show at Primary presented "a commentary on the constructed mythology and fetishism surrounding the US as a place of desire and opportunity, particularly by underprivileged young males who have normalised wearing the American flag in the streets of Cairo". Cüneyt's conversation with the artist aimed to facilitate a wider reflection on Ahmed's art practice. The event focused on how Ahmed's practice engages with postcolonial gender politics, and particularly Arab masculinities, in the MENA region. Cüneyt's well-researched questions provided a comparative vision through which Ahmed's career, ideas and influences can be explored along with other migrant/postcolonial contexts of contemporary art production. The event resulted in a very productive dialogue with its audience and it received very positive feedback. I was grateful to see that we had the privilege to benefit from Cüneyt's continuing professional ambition to facilitate cross-cultural, international debates on contemporary arts, and shape local audiences' perceptions and understandings of global identity politics in arts and culture.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your faithfully,



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