

# *BANU CENNETOĞLU*

## **Legacy of fragility**

Banu Cennetoğlu interviewed by Michael C. Vazquez  
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The first thing you notice about Banu Cennetoğlu is her seriousness. Even as she smiles her shy smile, her eyes show her reticence. She wants to know what the interview is going to be about; the way she asks makes it seem like there is a wrong answer. She is a control freak, she will later admit, after some of the wariness has worn away. At one point she stopped answering questions about her most popular publishing project for a year, for fear that people would like it the wrong way. When it is all done she will observe, correctly, that we have talked too much about too many things. But then, in the end, it was fun.

I met Cennetoğlu at *BAS*, her space near Tünel Square in Istanbul, down the stairs from the funicular and around the corner from one of the city's finer manti restaurants. *BAS* is a wisp of a storefront, with narrow tables strewn with books along either wall and a desk in the back. Decoration is minimal — a large cut-out collage of an upside-down library anchors one wall, while a copper plate with a selfportrait by the late Masist Gül, a self-styled “Mature Sufferer Art Specialist,” stands guard over *BAS*'s occupants. A tiny sticker announces “this is shit” over a slender pigeon-bespattered window in the back.

Cennetoğlu is part of a generation of Turkish artists relatively unscarred by the excitement and trauma of the 1970s, an era of experimentation in music, film, and art that came crashing down with the military coup of 1980. In the last five years a small flurry of spaces have opened, including *BAS*, 5533, PiST, and Rodeo Gallery. But in the Turkish context, Cennetoğlu is best known as an apostle of the artist's book. *BAS* is, among other things, a public archive of artists' books in Turkey. With the Dutch artist Philippine Hoegen, she founded Bent, the first publishing house devoted to the promotion and realization of the form in Turkey. And though she is not represented by any gallery, she has made a career out of making small, sometimes

dense, books of text and photography, including *False Witness* (2003) and *15 Scary Asian Men* (2005), along with photographic installations and the occasional video. Now, to her surprise and perhaps delight and perhaps also slight consternation, she is one of two artists representing Turkey at the Venice Biennale.

**Michael Vazquez:** *So what is your project for the Turkish pavilion at Venice?*

**Banu Cennetoğlu:** It's called *Catalog*, and it's a simulation of a mail order catalog. I wanted to create a big, thick, performative book. The idea was to challenge the idea of the artist's book and the idea of the catalog at the same time. It is an artist's book — six copies will be on display in the pavilion. But it is also a catalog, which has this function, to advertise its contents.

**MV:** *How does it work?*

**BC:** So the viewer comes into this small room, which is quite formally set. Very dry, all in gray — nothing warm or welcoming. On each table there are two books. You can sit and look. The book itself is organized by fifteen categories, inspired by those of stock photography, like FAMILY, YOUTH, SPORT, HOLIDAY. So *Catalog's* categories include COMPOSITION, VANITY, INVASION, and SEIZURE. In each category there are a certain number of images, unequally distributed. There might be sixty-three, there might be four. The only thing that changes from page to page is a little square on the top right corner of each image, with a code in it. There aren't any headlines or titles, just pages and pages of images, bound into a book. The paper is quite thin. And if you like anything in the catalog, there's a little form on the table that you can mark with the code of the photograph that you like. You take the form home with you, and you can go to the website, write in the code, and the photo is yours. You can download the image for free... exclusively during the Venice Biennale.

**MV:** *How many images do we get to choose from?*

**BC:** Four hundred fifty-one. That's what I found interesting, the choosing. The relationship between the photographs and the category they are placed in aims to question the classificatory methods of the viewer, as well as the effect photography has as a medium. While turning the pages of *Catalog*, there's a possibility that the viewer might choose one or a few among many photographs. One's likes and dislikes become part of the work. They have to act if they want a part of it. The compilation is very diverse, from very normal scenes to iconic ones. There is a

whole series from Yugoslavia after the war — suburban neighborhoods, government buildings, landmarks such as the Sarajevo Public Library. And there are images of the World Trade Center on that morning, in the moment of the fire, after the first plane crashed.

**MV:** *Which category are those in?*

**BC:** EXCURSION. I've never used them before. So I'm interested to know what criteria people will use. Will they choose the one that has the better composition? Or the one that seems to be already part of this collective memory that we have for the iconic imagery of 9/11? From my perspective, I wanted to criticize the attitude of the artist or photographer who goes to a place, spends a few days there, gets what they can, and then makes a work out of it. There is a sense in which this book is meant as a kind of monument to the fragility, the weakness, of photography.

**MV:** *Are all the images yours? Your photographs?*

**BC:** Almost all of them. There's a game in it, too, Foto Quiz, filed under LOVE. Eighteen images of mundane objects, photographed in this very weird position, from the 1960s. Those are not mine.

**MV:** *I like that the book is at once inviting, in its format and with this "special offer," and forbidding, in its size and heft and uniformity, its lack of context.*

**BC:** Yeah. I have been dealing with this question since I started making books. *False Witness* was the first real book I made, the first one to be mass produced. It was about the manipulation of sources, parallel approaches that had nothing to do with one another. One was the photographic documentation I had made at an Asylum Seeker's Center in Ter Apel, the other was sentence fragments containing the word "measure" that I'd taken from this corpus-based data. And nobody knew what to do with it. There wasn't enough information. A very few people were pleased or interested enough to talk to me about it, if I was around. But for most people there wasn't enough motivation. And so people went away with the idea of just random images, one after another, which was not what I meant at all. Now I think of that book as a kind of trial for something more like *Catalog*. It only took me six years to figure it out...

**MV:** *You started your career in New York, right?*

**BC:** I moved from Paris to New York in 1996 — I had an offer from an agency. I did documentary and fashion photography for a few years. But I started to feel really uncomfortable with the whole system of commissions. You get an assignment and you put your whole brain and heart into it, and you're all excited it's going to be published. And then you see it in the magazine and you're like, What the fuck is this? Even with a magazine like *Purple*. I'd started traveling in the former Yugoslavia and Georgia and here in Turkey, to the southeast. And it became problematic for me, taking this quite fragile material and contextualizing it in this pool of beautiful images. It seemed too poetic in this very random way. I needed to be more concrete. So I worked on my own for a while, and then I just kind of quit and I applied to the Rijksakademie. And I got in, and I moved to Amsterdam.

**MV:** *When was that?*

**BC:** In 2001, just after September 11. The Rijksakademie was great — two years, they give you the opportunity to research, housing, project money, anything. You can do whatever you want. It's a dream. Especially for someone coming from New York, so narrow and vertical, where I was so broke. Suddenly I was in Holland, in Amsterdam, in this huge studio. I was like, "What do I do here?"

**MV:** *So what did you do?*

**BC:** Amsterdam was where I really got involved with artist's books. In New York, when I got stressed out about the whole system, I would hang out at Printed Matter. It was a place where I could stay for hours, just learning things and meeting people and not spending even a penny. It really was my ideal place, and over time I kind of found my way to working with books. My application to Rijksakademie was all these handmade books, actually. And in Amsterdam there was a similar place, Boekie Woekie, this super-tiny bookstore that is really full, full, full. You enter and they have originals of Fluxus publications, things I had never seen with my bare eyes. That is also a kind of heaven for me.

**MV:** *What was the appeal of the artist's book?*

**BC:** The idea that I don't need to go out to exhibit my work, I could just be on my own in my little room. I don't need a curator, I don't need an editor, I don't need anyone to judge my work. I could be all those things. And the thing that ties it all together is binding. The act of binding

is very violent — you force images to coexist in this very physical way. And it forces you to confront what happens to these images, stories, compilations, when you put them in sequence. How can I deal with this togetherness? That was how I started to make books.

**MV:** *And how did you start making books with Philippine Hoegen? Had you met her in Holland?*

**BC:** No, we met here, funnily enough. I had moved back to Turkey in 2005. Philippine was living in Istanbul and we met and we hit it off. She said she was thinking of starting a magazine. I talked about my passion for artists' books. And so we came up with the idea of a periodical — an un-periodical periodical. An artist's book — but in a series. And that became Bent.

**MV:** *And BAS is you? Or this space?*

**BC:** Yeah, *BAS* is this space. Someone offered this spot to me, sponsored, and I took it. *BAS* is basically a kind of roof. And Bent is the main production project of *BAS*. That [*points at a pile of books*] is Bent. And that [*points at a pile of books*] is the punk book, which is its own thing. An Interrupted History of Punk and Underground Resources in Turkey. I did that with two other editors, Sezgin Boynik and Tolga Güdallı. I never had a punk history, personally. I kind of didn't believe it ever really existed in Turkey. It always seemed very formal to me, something imported from abroad. So this project was a way to investigate that. So *BAS* is the result of several collaborations and the generous help of friends. But officially I run the space alone. And it is important for me to keep my sense of freedom. I can close this place whenever I want — if I want to just disappear and move to Mozambique, I can.

**MV:** *So what exactly is BAS? It is not so easy to pin down.*

**BC:** People come here and they see different things. *BAS* is not really a bookstore, it's not a gallery, it's not a publishing house. It's a constellation of things.

**MV:** *It's not a store? You do sell things, don't you?*

**BC:** Only the books that we produce ourselves. But all of this [*gestures at the long tables*] is not for sale.

**MV:** *Is this all your own personal archive?*

**BC:** No. Well, it started with my private archive, when we opened in 2006. But it has grown since then. Developing the archive is one of the main goals of *BAS*. So we buy things, we barter, we go to artist's book fairs. And people send us things. Now it's officially the *BAS* collection. These days I prefer "collection" to "archive" — the point is that it's on permanent display.

**MV:** *What does BAS mean?*

**BC:** *Bas* is an imperative, an order. From *basmak*, the word for "print." So it means, "Print!" *Basmak* also means "to step," like if you step on something, and also to catch someone in an inappropriate situation. Like if you find your spouse with someone else.

**MV:** *To bust.*

**BC:** Exactly. And it's also a Dutch male name, Bas. [*Laughs*]

**MV:** *And Bent?*

**BC:** *Bent* means reservoir.

**MV:** *So the first thing you and Philippine did as Bent, the first edition, was the hand-drawn Masist Gül book that we featured in the PULP issue of Bidoun?*

**BC:** *Bent 001* was an edition of six books, the first-ever reproduction of these books Masist Gül made in the 1980s. He called them *Kaldırım Destanı — Kaldırımlar Kurdunun Hayatı*. *Kaldırım* is pavement, *Destanı* is myth. The full title is "Pavement Myth — The Life of the Pavement's Wolf."

**MV:** *So Masist Gül exists, right? Or existed, I mean. He was a real person?*

**BC:** ...

**MV:** [*Laughs*] *Because I have to say, when Bidoun first found out about him, and then again when we worked with you and you were so sparing with what information you would give out*

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*about him, we began to wonder whether you had made him up.*

**BC:** No, no, he was an actor. In lots of movies, from very famous ones to super-shitty ones, always the same character — this big, bad guy.

**MV:** *Do you draw?*

**BC:** Do I draw? No.

**MV:** *Not at all?*

**BC:** Just a stick man. Nothing, unfortunately. [*Laughs*]

**MV:** *OK, fine. So how did you find out about him?*

**BC:** To make a super-long story, super-short... . In 2003, I was still living in Amsterdam, but I was back here in Istanbul for the summer. I was working on *False Witness*, actually — I printed and launched it here. It was July 2003, and one of these stupid TV news channels said, “Masist Gül, one of the very famous extras of Turkish cinema, has been found dead in his Tarlabashi house.” Tarlabashi is this dodgy area. I mean, the government says it’s dodgy, it’s a little bit more dangerous compared with the rest of Istanbul. And they showed excerpts from his films, and him — this super-powerful figure with this big mustache, a bodybuilder type of appearance, and always fighting. And they said that he was found in a very nasty... . At that time I was thinking of making a work about heroism — the title was going to be *Disposable Heroism*, and I was interested in why people become heroes, and when you stop being a hero. So this kind of powerful figure, so fragile and so vulnerable. It just struck me, and I wanted to know more about him, about the life he had lived.

**MV:** *You had never heard of him before?*

**BC:** No. But when I saw him, I recognized him from films and even, I realized I had seen him around, because he was always walking. So then I went looking for more information. There is a street here, Yeşilçam Street, where all those kind of second- and third-degree actors hang out and wait for directors to come and pick them up. It’s a famous street. There are a lot of trees above, so it almost feels like a covered street with plants. You should go, it’s a nice one. And

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there is a teahouse. So I went there and asked about him, and one after the other people guided me toward this secondhand shop. “Talk to Irfan,” they said, “maybe he has some material, maybe some film stills.” But nobody told me about Gül’s artistic practice. So I went to Irfan and I asked if he had anything about Masist Gül. He looked at me, disappeared, and came back with a huge bag. I was like, “What is this?” and he was like, “All of his stuff.” So I went through it quickly, and I saw some drawings and some photocopied portraits, and I said “How much?” And he said, “Ten thousand dollars.” I’m like, “Well, sorry. Forget about it, I don’t have that kind of money and will never have that money to give you. But what I want to do — I am an artist, I work with books, and this is what I do. Maybe I want to make a book about him one day.” And he said, “Well, this is what it is.” I kept going back. Soon, you know, we were drinking tea and blah blah blah, and finally he allowed me to take a few images and photocopy them. And I took the photocopies with me to Amsterdam. I never did manage to do anything with them because it always felt wrong. Too easy to dramatize, too easy to take advantage. But then years later, when I started Bent with Philippine, I said, “Let’s see if it’s still there.” We went back to the junk shop and it was! And the guy was like, “Wow! You came back.” So what we proposed to him was a collaboration. We said, “We don’t have any money, but we want to publish a book, we can edit a book on his work.”

**MV:** *And he said OK.*

**BC:** No, he didn’t say any OK.

**MV:** *Sorry — so you’re still going through the bag in the store.*

**BC:** Yes, and then suddenly we were going through this big bag, and we found the *Kaldırım Destanı*. These six little books. And we realized we had to publish them. We didn’t need to make an artist’s book about him — he had made the artist’s books himself. But we said we had to publish all six of them. So I started to work it out in my head like a problem — we were going to have to find his family, and get permission, and we said to Irfan, “OK, work with us, allow us to use this and then we will make a note about your space, people will come and buy his stuff from you!” And he said, “No, no, I need cash money right now.” We went back and forth, back and forth. And finally he understood that ten thousand dollars was, like, impossible.

**MV:** *Did he sell anything in his place for ten thousand? Or was he hoping to cash in?*



**BC:** He was hoping that I was a dealer or something. But he eventually understood that I am broke. And then finally, after all this time, two and a half years, right before I was leaving the country, he said, “Yes, you can buy them, for one thousand.” Even that I didn’t have.

**MV:** *You could have everything?*

**BC:** Everything, whatever was there. So I kind of found that amount, and we took it all home, and that was the start. That was November 2005.

**MV:** *And when did BAS officially open?*

**BC:** March 2006. A really official inauguration, announcing what we were doing. And then we published *Kaldırım* in May 2006.

**MV:** *So you found his family, then?*

**BC:** Well, everyone in Turkey was dead. At one point we heard that Masist had a half-brother in France who was alive, but we had no idea where. And then by chance, coincidence really, we found him. We had found a reference to another brother who had died, and I went to see where he’d lived, and one of the neighbors just gave me the number of the half-brother in France. That was the end of a chain of miracles. There were lots of lawyers and Armenian graveyards and funeral homes. Masist was Armenian, you know.

**MV:** *Did you meet the half-brother?*

**BC:** Yah. He was very serious, a very hard, very beautiful man.

**MV:** *Very big, like Masist?*

**BC:** No, very small. But built up. And I found him.

**MV:** *Can I ask how Masist died?*

**BC:** He died... I don’t really want to go into it. The thing is, when you read all of his material, he

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wanted to die. The Armenian church told us that they were giving him cash for a little bread or for cheese or whatever, and he was using the money for alcohol — not beer, but pure ethyl alcohol, like, something that you cannot even smell. Something happened in the mid-1970s. He fell in love with a woman, and the woman didn't want him, and for him that was like a curse on all mundane daily pleasures. So he said, "I will never ever taste any pleasure in this world." And all of his drawings are based on this, too, it's the same story over and over. People ask me, because he was Armenian, you know, "Is he talking about identity, or anything political?" Absolutely nothing. His brother is very political, very angry toward the Turkish authorities, but Masist never mentions anything about those issues. It is always super-personal, about love and not being loved, about not finding the right nest, you know? And because in this costume he was always such a powerful and mean guy, but he was such a fragile soul, I mean so fragile, and his work is so detailed. From this big man you see these little drawings, so detailed and crazy. I am in love with them, so I cannot really... People say he was always quite introverted, always drawing. And there is a letter, actually — we always show this letter when we exhibit the work. We would never have dared to publish if we hadn't found this letter. It's a crazy letter, very short, and it's to his potential audience. It says, "I know one day you'll find this, so I am not worrying about that. I didn't do this to victimize myself, or to gain power, or to patronize anyone. I did this because I needed to do this, and I know that one day people will see it."

**MV:** *Is there a lot of other work?*

**BC:** There's a lot. He has another book, actually, he calls it a sourcebook. There are pages and pages of — I don't know if there is a name for it. It's always four lines. It's a kind of poem. And it's crazy, it's violent, it's pornographic, some of it. It's always about the same characters and same story but it doesn't have endings or beginnings. I assume that he wrote this and then he took from it and finalized it as *Kaldırım*. Or maybe he was going to continue the story, or he was going to create a new series. We don't know. It's not really a sketchbook because he does not make mistakes. It's not about trial and error, really he is just rhyming, and it's all fucking rhyming.

**MV:** *Wait, it rhymes?*

**BC:** It's madness. I mean, it is so beautiful. And then there is some kind of drawing. When we exhibited his work we filmed this book and we showed it as a video piece, just a few seconds for each page, so that you could feel the intensity, although you couldn't really read it. At one

point he calls himself “Mature Sufferer Art Specialist: Masist Gül.” And Gül means “ash” but Gül means “rose,” also. And this *[points at image]* is his logo, this kind of thinking man — he always uses this as his signature.

**MV:** *So that was your first project? [Laughs] And right away you put out another book.*

**BC:** Yes, one month after we launched the first of the Masist books. *Kaldırım Destanı* actually came out over six months, because Masist had conceived it as a monthly magazine. But it was important that we do something completely different. As I say, the idea of the artist’s book was — is — still very vague in Turkey. So people thought we were just publishing comic books or facsimiles of old journals. A lot of people came to us with their drawings and their comics, and we had to say no.

**MV:** *I can see how one might get confused after seeing Masist’s work.*

**BC:** So *Bent 002* was a montage of phrases from three language phrasebooks: two Turkish–French and one Turkish Japanese. And as you read it, you realize that it is a crime story. *Takip/ Poursuite* — in Turkish and French, “pursuit.” That was by Aslı Çavuşoğlu, one of the very few people here working with literature and visual art. And it was all text, no images, and the artist was, you know, very contemporary, conceptual, and also female. Kind of the furthest extreme possible from Masist. *[Laughs]*

**MV:** *How did it come about?*

**BC:** Well, knowing me and knowing *BAS*, Aslı sent just a one page sheet with the idea about this contextual appropriation of literature and guidebooks, with these ready-made sentences arranged so as to tell a story. I liked it very much, and I introduced it to Philippine, who agreed, and so we proposed that she work on a book using this method and see what happens.

**MV:** *Does the story resolve? I mean, is the crime solved?*

**BC:** Little bit. Do you read French?

**MV:** *I do not. See? You can’t spoil it for me because I can’t read it.*

**BC:** Yeah, at the end of the day, you know who murdered whom.

**MV:** *When you were choosing the artists that you were going to work with, did you look for people whose works already exhibited a tendency toward artist's books?*

**BC:** Actually it's the opposite. We prefer to work with people who've never done a book before. We wanna be the first! Though in fact there aren't many artists working with artist's books, and if a famous artist wanted to make one, he or she could just propose it to their institution, anyway. They wouldn't need us. We want to work with people who have a great idea and don't yet know how to realize it. So in fact Aslı had never made a book before, but since Takip she's made four more artist's books.

**MV:** *That's great.*

**BC:** And similarly with Emre Hüner, who did *Bent 003*. He's a fantastic artist, but nobody knew him in Istanbul until our book launch. And now he has a gallery, he's in the New Museum...

**MV:** *That's great, too.*

**BC:** He's amazing. That book he did for us took a year. He only worked on this book the whole time. It's a crazy production.

**MV:** *Did he approach you, then?*

**BC:** No. I'd seen a video of his in Tirana when I was there for the Tirana Biennale. We went to an opening in an apartment one night, and there was this huge projection of *Panopticon*. And I was just mesmerized. Normally I spend, like, three minutes with video work. So this was unbelievable. And again, I told Philippine about him, and we met him at one point when he was coming to Istanbul, and we said, "Would you consider making a book?" And he was interested in this challenge. Of course, we had no idea what he was going to do. And up until the very last moment, we still had no idea what he was doing. He was like, "I don't know, I'm just working, I don't know, I'm just working."

**MV:** *And again, that book was completely different from either of the two books that preceded it. As was Bent 004, Cevdet Erek's SSS, which might be the weirdest book you've done.*

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**BC:** *SSS* is a very personal subjective manual for imitating the sound of the sea by rubbing a carpet. It's very nice. I'm very pleased with the way it turned out, though it was difficult in a different way. That book grew out of a performance of Cevdet's, something he does all the time in a very instinctive way. And suddenly he had to be able to conceptualize what he was doing and be able to articulate it. And he had no experience with writing. He's an artist and a musician, but he'd never worked with text. The risk with this was that we didn't want the book to be just the documentation or the illustration of his live performance. But it worked. And for what it was — a manual for simulating the sound of the sea by rubbing a carpet — it sold very well. *[Laughs]*

**MV:** *And then you just released a new book in May.*

**BC:** Yah, *Kılavuz*. It's a book of tests, kind of like the Scholastic Aptitude Tests, but the Turkish versions, which are more extreme and more stupid. It's by Altıkunst, an artists' collective of three women. They came to us because they have this email project where every week they create and send out a kind of digital sticker, from out of the week's news. They said they wanted to make a book of those stickers. And we said, "Why? This is an Internet project, leave it like that." But we were interested to work with a collective, especially a female collective, and we were interested to work on a very local topic. So we told them to come up with a proposal for a book, and they came back with this idea for a book of SAT tests. Periodically the newspaper gives trial tests to students, which reveal the ideology and the moral values of the Turkish state. So they collected those tests and chose very peculiar ones and edited it in such a way that it shows the absurdity of the situation. And at the end there's an index, which is very important, it's a kind of semi-factual, semifictional index. So when you read the words one after another, you really kind of read the subtitles of the whole thing. It's all in Turkish, this one. We didn't translate anything — because of the localness of the material, it would be impossible to translate.

**MV:** *That sounds amazing. I think you might be underestimating foreign interest in the peculiarities of Turkish nationalism — there must be dozen of us who would read that in translation. But I hear you. Actually I want to go back to Masist Gül — especially in the context of all these other books, as part of Bent, alongside all these artists, and also in light of the exhibitions of his work that you've organized in Brussels and Berlin. I guess I'm wondering about the choices you've made. I mean, you have this person whom you desperately want to work*

*with, who doesn't exist anymore. And you can't not do something. But then it's totally up to you to decide how to present him. And there is a sense in which, for example, Masist could be read as an outsider artist.*

**BC:** Yeah, exactly. Like when people think about Henry Darger and make connections.

**MV:** *But in your presentation, he is very much a... contemporary artist.* [Laughs]

**BC:** This is a super-personal subject. I am not a critic or a historian, but I found that his approach doesn't make him an outsider for me. From what I understand about outsider art — and as I say, I am not an expert at all — there is something more raw about their production, a sense of naiveté. Masist's technique is very raw, but when you see the work it is very aware, and this awareness creates a strange irony with this rawness. I think that is why I cannot really call him an outsider. Did that answer your question?

**MV:** *Kind of. There is still a bit of a disconnect for me. I can't think of anyone who could have been an outsider artist who debuted as a contemporary artist.*

**BC:** That's true. And Philippine and I are artists. Maybe if we were dealers or collectors we would have presented his work differently. But we don't think it's our job to do this.

**MV:** *You are not his gallery.*

**BC:** No. And we don't want to be.

**MV:** *But you have his archive.*

**BC:** And I want to have his archive, I don't want to sell it. It is something that I want to show my daughter when she's old enough. It's a very ethically problematic situation. After the Masist exhibition at the Berlin Biennial, we started getting even more invitations, and we said no. We say yes to certain things, but it's a lot of work, we want to make sure it's done right. Not exoticized or sensationalized. Already, with the books, the work is circulating from Santa Barbara to I don't know where, in very different geographies. There are very big risks to doing all of these things.

**MV:** *I guess the question occurred to me because of what seemed to be a relationship between Masist's hero, the Pavement's Wolf, and older Turkish heroes, like Tarkan or Karaoğlan, that were big in the comics and the movies in the 1960s and '70s.*

**BC:** Well, Tarkan is a rural figure, whereas Masist was playing with this very urban figure, this kind of urban Robin Hood with the shoes and the big mustache and the open shirt.

**MV:** *Wait, that's a type?*

**BC:** Not even a type, it's a cliché. We call it *Kabadayı* in Turkish. He protects the poor and the weak, but he is also quite raw. But this question is something I think about a lot. I gave a presentation a few years ago about artists' books, and especially Masist's work. And I said to the students, "What is the difference between an artist's book and a comic book? If Masist had had the chance to get *Kaldırım* published, could he have been a Tarkan?" The question was, could *Kaldırım* have been a comic book? And there is no real answer for it. But for me, I don't think so. When you know his character, when you know his darkness, when you know his obscurity, when you know his other work and his relationship with books and journals and collages... it is an artist's book. But I don't know his conditions back then, I can only judge from what I am seeing right now. I can never prove that in a different context and a different time, it might not have appeared as a kind of Tarkan-style series. Who knows? Though the thing about comics is that kids read them, and *Kaldırım* is very violent. There are pages and pages of the witch torturing the kid who later becomes the hero. It would be inconceivable to show this to a child — it's hard for some adults. Anyway, we are not in a position to talk about this. From my perspective, I found in the books the intention and the production quality, so that I could say, "Yes, they are artist's books." But it is very, very, super subjective. There is no rule for it.

**MV:** *Did you ever get tired of it? Tired of him?*

**BC:** Yeah. Right after we launched. The Turkish press did a lot of interviews at first. But actually we made a conscious decision that we were not going to tell Masist's story at all. When people asked, "How did you find him?" We would say, "Just coincidences." I didn't say anything about him or his personal life for a year or two. The work had to be the focus. Because it's so easy to just go to the story instead. The story was so juicy! People got so involved in it, some people cried, I was like, "Oh my God!" I didn't even tell you all of the details, so many strange coincidences... . So then people get excited about the story more than the work.

**RODEO**

**MV:** *I mean, it is a great story... Do you think you might tell that story some time? With all the details?*

**BC:** No. Some people are like, “Will you make a film?” and I am like, “No!” My aim was just so that more people should know him, and now more people know him. That’s enough. We have other things to do.

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