
**INTERVIEW
WITH JÉRÔME SANS
2011**

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J.S. When did you start your collaboration and why?

:MK You might not recognize it at first but we are very different from each other, both with an unusual disposition. It was the anticipation of an uncanny outcome that triggered us to collaborate.

We started working together in 1995 during the first project we realized in Devlet Han which was used for exhibitions as well as functioning as a studio on Istiklal Street. After the collaboration in 1995, our individual works and production styles started gradually to converge and engendered a common ground. In 1998, the inception of :mentalKLINIK as both an idea and an actual space, followed. We decided as a duo to start up a space where we would be able to develop our art practice as well as art theory in an interdisciplinary setting. We never limited things to only one form; on the contrary we were interested in the multiplicity of forms.

Actually, since the beginning of our collaboration we are aiming to achieve what one might define as the third position while working as a duo. This is perhaps where our idea of plurality is grounded.

J.S. What did each of you produce separately before you met each other and started to work together?

:MK We were both working as individual artists before we started collaborating. Birol had many solo and group exhibitions. Yasemin, besides working as an individual artist, participated with the "Kültür Group" to a project in Shedhalle, Zurich and to the 5th Istanbul Biennial curated by Rosa Martinez. Gradually, Birol's passion for material contaminated Yasemin while her interest in theory contaminated Birol.

J.S. Besides your life as a couple, what brought you to a shared artistic collaboration?

:MK A couple? That is something we tend to forget quite often... During our past experiences of collaborating with each other, we worked together even as we conceived of an idea, much before the

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processes of presentation or construction. Thus the structure almost always automatically formed and flowed. Yet the form identified and defined itself as if autonomously, and in that process of flow we became a duo.

We don't simply complete each other; rather we produce and create while deconstructing one another's work. We provoke each other. There is almost always something like an error within our work, something reminiscent of a defeat. At times we each try to negate one another as we work. For example in our last work, we even tried to eradicate both our signatures. To erase, to efface attracts us both. Sometimes Birol starts with a material and Yasemin objects to it; then the material disappears and a new one replaces it. Actually there is almost always an initial phase where we construct in our minds by just talking. And in that phase everything finds its own material, its own construction and deconstruction processes. Then, the end result is always more than, beyond the sum of the two of us; it is always a third. Very rarely what we end up with is something we started with. It always transforms on the way...

J.S. From 1998 to 2000 you opened a space named Boutique éphémère. What was the concept?

:MK What we aimed at during that early phase of :mentalkLINIK was to eradicate institutionalization and hierarchy. We invited participants from different disciplines. This enabled us to equalize them in a way, not in the sense of identifying them with each other but in terms of refusing to place them within a hierarchy. We were trying to move beyond our own institutionalization as well as trying to break free from the institutionalization of art and culture in general.

Actually, the name you refer to "Boutique éphémère" was the title of our friend Joel Andrianomearisoa's exhibition, a fifteen days boutique, which we hosted in our space. In any case the idea of an ephemeral boutique was something that we had been utilizing in our projects. For example Marie-Claude Beaud, director of MUDAM who commissioned the ~self01 project, called it "Expo Vente." All the projects we realized then pointed at the idea of ephemerality within

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Our exhibition space had a cloud of suspicion around it. We have to admit that we love this state of causing doubt and suspicion, this state of dubiousness. Although the space did not apparently invite anyone in once someone entered inside, its ambience kept him/her captive.

J.S. How did the activity you had at the Boutique Ephemere evolve into the artistic team you became thereafter?

:MK We had a very productive and enriching process but we knew that if we continued on the same we would start repeating ourselves and become institutionalized - exactly what we were trying to avoid! We did not want the whole thing to become a signature. We could foresee that if we continued, the form would be established, finalized.

After the first MUDAM experience we had a more introverted phase up until 2007. Then, in 2007, we were invited to participate in the "Tomorrow Now: when design meets science fiction" exhibition at MUDAM curated by Alexandra Midal and Björn Dahlström. We started to work and create as Yasemin Baydar and Birol Demir, and Frozen 45" was our first creation with which we participated to the exhibition. That same year we went to Madagascar for participating in Joel's special birthday exhibition "30 and almost-dreams". In addition to all these, we realized another ephemeral, one-week long exhibition Binary Occupations in our space.

J.S. Why have you chosen to work under the generic name :mentalkLINIK? What does this term mean for you?

:MK It has a reference to our early phase when we also contemplated on the concept and phenomena of clinic; what does it mean to work on a case? What does it mean to gather a group of people around a case and discuss the matter in hand with them?

It also represents something where theory and practice coexist, like the 'mental' referring to the mind and the 'clinic' to the practice. Last

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but not the least, it was the catchiness of the name which interested and attracted us the most. Rather than using two separate artist's names we wanted an anonymous name which would also be catchy. We should not forget that the therapeutic effect is a part of our work from time to time as well!

J.S. Why have you placed the punctuation of a (:) colon within your generic name :mentalKLINIK?

:MK Because we are a duo since the beginning! And because, we are always saying something, stating something. The colon implies that something is just about to follow while it also builds up an expectation. When we start speaking what always follows at first is :mentalKLINIK. We always pronounce :mentalKLINIK in the beginning. The (:) also enables us to take the first place when in an alphabetical order.

J.S. Why mental is in small letters and KLINIK big ?

:MK We are not conservative about it anymore... Sometimes we use only small letters and at other times only capital letters. We don't care either way as long as it somehow subverts the meaning...

J.S. Is this an affirmation that your art is about ideas rather than marketable objects and that your work is a reactionary form of open laboratory, a think tank that you develop together?

:MK We might talk of something where the idea and the object are superposed, overlapped. Since the beginning, even when we started first with a concept, we let the objects develop always in relation with the concept, the idea. We let the participants produce and create something rejecting the preliminary concept if they wished. Sometimes the ideas transformed the objects and sometimes the other way around. The process was never too strict. At the end of the day what we strived for was to produce the traces which would appeal to the various senses of the audience. Therefore the objects and the ideas constantly collided with each other; the energy thus created carried things beyond the five senses. :mentalKLINIK's theory and

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We can talk of openness in the sense of breaking down the strict boundaries of disciplines. Not in the sense of being an open laboratory, open to anyone's participation. It was always with our initiation first that we started to collaborate with people. We opened up a laboratory space within the concept, the subject we were interested in. That space assumed an open quality once we invited people into that space. Besides, all our work including the most recent ones is open-ended.

The fact that we work as a duo might also contribute to the sense of openness in our work. The idea of being crowded, populous, especially when you work within arts and culture, as well as the fact of being within Turkey's geography might at times breed very tiring processes. Even if we praise ways of creating collaboratively, it still is a very difficult process and has the inclination to tend towards something where egos clash. However we address the notion of crowdedness as polyphony. It is not singularity but polyphony which interests us. Like in the ~self01 exhibition, even if things seemed to have a singular style on the surface they created a polyphonic nature of their own.

J.S. Who are the patients of your Klinik?

:MK They are variable. However we can definitely talk about a therapeutic effect. Anyone who visits an exhibition of ours always leaves with a particular state of mind beyond only seeing the works.

We now work with Galerist but we still have a group of young :mentalKLINIK followers visiting the gallery. Galerist gained a new, different group of audience. It is difficult to define our followers either in terms of age or profession; they are really variable. Our work sometimes touches upon everyday life and if someone is interested in a piece from everyday life then s/he can relate to our work. What we are trying to say is that it is not necessary for him or her to have an intellectual background or to be related with contemporary art.

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J.S. How would you define your work?

:MK We don't like to define it but we might talk about it. We don't like definitions...

21st century brought about a distinctive model of artistic existence. As artists of this generation we create open-ended works which don't subject an art work to exact definitions. There is simultaneity between the materials used and the techniques employed. As an artist duo we work to open up unfamiliar dimensions, new spaces and unknown senses. The aesthetics of design, new technologies and new media are all among our inspirations. :mentalKLINIK's aesthetic, rather than create a visual style, stimulates various senses. We present the audience with a new visuality which they have not consumed before. We use the materials of today and the language of today. We are interested in the present moment, in the "now". And we expand this present moment. We look for the ideologies behind everything that stimulates us; we are under an immense bombardment in the extremely short duration of the moment. These ideologies provoke the suspense and anxiety in our works. There came first a generation who wanted to dominate nature and now our generation wants to make peace with it but in a utilitarian manner. Along with this attitude come many anxieties. The electrification in the body and the state of mind this anxiety generates provides the vibrancy and the ambiguous aesthetic of our works.

J.S. What are your art and cultural references?

:MK We are influenced equally by a concept, an artist, an art movement, fashion, an emergent culture, architecture, biochemistry, a new technology or philosophy of science. Art is not necessarily our primary source of inspiration. All those disciplines which shape us and all the gaps within their relationships to culture influence us and provoke us to create. At the same time we have a very skeptical approach to culture and history since the beginning. Or, a suspicious approach more precisely. The more we see of how history is recorded and transferred, how it is made up of many layers and how there is an

The more we observe how history is recorded and transferred, how it is made up of many layers and how there is an abundance of distorted, deceitful histories, the more we become suspicious.

abundance of distorted, deceitful histories, the more we become suspicious. We think that geography is a given. The geography we occupy generates many expectations as the third world. Yet we never were interested in or responded to those expectations. However, we should admit that the presence of those expectations provoked us; the orientalist gaze, the exotic perception. Even if avoiding these expectations directed us towards minimalism it also created ruptures with our geography.

J.S. Have you ever thought of referring to artists's groups from the 80s working under generic names such as GroupMaterial, Information Fiction Publicité, General Idea...?

:MK For example we have a lot in common with General Idea and there are many things parallel in our working methods. However we did not yet know of them when we formed our own method of work; we discovered them only later. We did not take any of them as a reference but now we identify the similarities retrospectively. There are similarities with them in terms of our desires and the reactions we gave to our era.

J.S. Why did you entitled your glass series-pieces Sliver? Does this have a connotation with slicing or cutting, something of an element of danger, like art

:MK Cutting and slicing; these are the elements of danger which mankind has been subject to for ages. Fragmentation and the severance of the relations with the general network paved the way for the "uni-person" to emerge. Under these circumstances one cannot gather together the pieces of "uni-person" who is consoled by the stories of individualism and personalization. The ruins of history and the fragmentation of mankind come into play in our works as a project of networking rather than as a reason for complaint. We have so many materials at our disposal We create a surface and that surface breaks into pieces the image of the onlooker and the space occupied by him. It transports him and the space into a suspicious, suspended dimension. The process also subjects him to a kind of violence and thus transforms him. His comfort zone is threatened as

he is confronted with a surface which constantly reflects back to him his image. It is a moment of confrontation for the on-looking subject with his own fragmentation. What we propose is not nature itself but man-made nature.

J.S. Your work seems to have a twist on minimalism of a Donald Judd. Is this reference intentional? What does minimalism mean for you?

:MK We like the works of Donald Judd but we don't work referencing directly a particular artist or an art movement. From time to time art history is a reference for our various works, however not more or not less than many other areas which also become a reference in our works. The reductionist approach of minimalism might be visually related to our work but on the other hand it has served also as a contrast for our work semantically. Our attitude renders visible the invisible, the ideological, in opposition to minimalism's approach which foregrounds objectivity. We are interested in invisible ideologies, in the fact that what you see is not actually what it is. What is seen is only a partial view of the façade. In the age of augmented reality, image and objectivity have lost their plausibility. Today time and space lapses create new mediums, and the virtual world is superimposed on the physical world.

The Western rationale prescribed categories. Art movements got categorized within these categories. Where we stand in time and space, we seek to break down the borders and surpass the categories. We like to imagine that all these categories get emptied into the sea and meld with it. So that new relationships, new aesthetics can emerge in the most unexpected moments; and this is the fluid modernity of the 21st century after postmodernity. That's very exciting and inspirational...

J.S. What is your Relationship to design?

:MK Design is an integral, an inseparable part of our lives and therefore it is also ideological. It dictates all of our lives...this ideological aspect of design provokes us and provokes the ideals!

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And what we are doing is like archeology; we are like the archeologists of today. Thus our narrative is always fragmented and interwoven.

J.S. Many of your ideas are born in series of unique pieces that you call a « set ». How does this function?

:MK The world is violently crowded!

J.S. Your production has multiple facets, not a single visual vocabulary. How do you link all your pieces, from Superhero to robots...?

:MK We create our own vocabularies; material vocabulary, sound vocabulary...all sorts of sensuous vocabularies. We build our story by associating these various parts and vocabularies within a network. Linear narrative is a pretty straight line or there are some zigzags. We regard our narrative as a network, a web. There are very emotional pieces as well as robots next to each another since our present day accommodates them all. Today it is impossible to talk of a single thing, a linear approach to history. After all these fractures, we now have fragmented identities. And what we are doing is like archeology; we are like the archeologists of today. Thus our narrative is always fragmented and interwoven.

Besides the teddy bears today are not hand-sawn; they are probably manufactured in factories operated by robots. The inhuman and the emotional stand overlapped, or face to face. A very inhuman thing can dwell in a humanly place or next to a humanly thing where such an encounter, confrontation is taking place. On the other hand all these robots are produced by humans to enable more leisure time. Technology is progressed for the benefit of mankind and that benefit is oriented towards the notion of leisure time. In the same process we observe also the robotification of humans. The tension in our works stems from such an anxiety. The applications of biochemistry and biotechnology in interaction with the human body, is a sort of robotification process. We are in a gap where the robot enters into the human body and where the human might transform into a robot. In the past there was such a binary opposition; the mankind and the nature. The man produced and improved technology looking at the nature. Today the robots are manufactured looking at men or animals. It is funny that all those robotic movements of the robots, barely freed of the organic quality of human movements, are very primitive for the

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time being. Once they start uniting with our bodies they will become invisible. By using robots we point at this ongoing process. It is also probable that what is emotional is getting robotic. How much does what we define as emotional today, resemble what was defined as emotional a hundred years ago?

J.S. Fear, Affect, Liar, some of your Works have emotional connotations next to others which are devoid of any human characteristics such as robots, slivers,... Why this extreme balance?

:MK This extreme balance reveals the disappearance of the borders between the human and the non-human; there is a tense relationship between the object and the human in our age, they are equalized as both are datafied. There is no longer a contrast between nature and man; these binary oppositions have collapsed. Such reflections determine our aesthetics. Emotional is natural and robotic at the same time...

J.S. Why your SuperHero is dressed as a teddy bear? Does it mean that the real hero today is the one who brings comfort and calm to society?

:MK The type of a leader who could provide comfort and calm to today's society is a totalitarian one; this is enough of a reason for uneasiness and anxiety. On the contrary, we are after not comfort and calm, but chaos. We believe that only the awkward and bizarre attractions within chaos can achieve to establish a new system.

Teddy bear represents a transitional object like a security blanket; only by means of the teddy bear does one separate from the mother figure which at another level evokes the separation of society from a totalitarian system.

J.S. Whiff, Double Cherry and Moet both have a hedonistic appeal which on the surface can be read as festive and glamorous but when you look a bit closer there is an underlying violence which denotes an after party or a creepy beginning of the end. Is this intentional?

When disgusting and beautiful coexist there is a new aesthetics, a fresh definition of beauty; you also render the violence of beauty more violent.

:MK We always celebrate the beginning of the end! New aesthetical excitements and body language, the visual codification of pleasure brought into our agenda by long lasting foreplays, the sexuality of a generation who can never achieve a complete orgasm find an embodiment in our inviting but distant aesthetics. We provoke our audience to experience the underlying violence once they enter into the world of this vicious glamour.

J.S. Like the title of this exhibition you often use oxymorons (figure of speech that combines contradictory terms) in your works with language (He is disgustingly handsome/ She is awfully beautiful) Is this a reflection on the inevitable paradox of life... death ?

:MK We don't celebrate life or its beginning by our works, we celebrate death. We celebrate the end; we celebrate because it is over. For example we celebrate when a movement comes to an end. It is the ending of something rather than its beginning which we celebrate.

As for the oxymorons, we use them as amplifiers, enhancers. They are oxymorons but also intensifiers at the same time. We propose that perhaps today we are under the domination of language more than ever. It is no longer enough to call someone beautiful. The way you employ language sets apart that someone's particular beauty from the others, and also reveals the difference of today's notion of beauty. When disgusting and beautiful coexist there is a new aesthetics, a fresh definition of beauty; you also render the violence of beauty more violent.

There is an element of violence in our works; that is maybe why we celebrate death... actually it is not death but more properly said the end, the finale. We take the celebration of the end in the service of a new beginning. It is not life we celebrate but the ending of present systems and this paves the way for a fertile ground on which new things can grow.

We are always aware of the paradox of life and death but it is new possibilities we celebrate by our works.

We don't use language to explain things; in fact we use it to blur things. We might use it also to blur what it points at. There is always a dynamic relationship.

J.S. What is your Relationship to language, to words?

:MK Language is one of the vocabularies of our aesthetics. We search for diversified means of expression. Language comes into play in our works as it is shaped within our aesthetics. When we write an independent text we want it to create a new meaning as it interacts, collides with other works. We don't use language to explain things; in fact we use it to blur things. We might use it also to blur what it points at. There is always a dynamic relationship. We say what we want to say by distorting it. Besides we defeat it once more by our aesthetics as we say it. To blur meaning, to make it awry, to open up a space for a new meaning to emerge; these are what inform our work.

J.S. Do you feel related to conceptual art?

:MK We build our art on conceptuality but not on conceptual art. Conceptualism resides in everything but conceptual art is the name of an art movement of a particular period, a period that is again categorized....

J.S. Why do you use carpets? Was it a way to play with clichés about Turkey?

:MK Carpets are a new means of expression, a new language. They are like a text; that's how we regard them. We create a new language with them and they speak in different dialects. They speak in a forbidden dialect. The staples on them refer to their urban disobedience. The carpets are produced using traditional methods, but the staples embedded on them are sharp, hard and pain-inflicting; they indicate violence. They bear on them the narratives of various centuries and regions but they also pierce the gaze of the observer. The staples bring in a distance; this distance also avoids any sort of an association with either orientalism or self-orientalism. We live in an age which has already moved far beyond these issues...

J.S. How do you see Turkey in the globalized time?

:MK In a globalized age Turkey is carried away with the idea of progress. We believe that it follows the path of progress. However this notion

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of progress, of development is the continuation, extension of the western thought of the 20th century. Progress is placed always before and above everything else since Turkey has not experienced the process of modernization in a healthy way or like western societies; therefore it sometimes stands in the way of many things. It bears a destructive potential.

Turkey is also politically very rooted and therefore it embraces with enthusiasm all impacts of globalism be it from the east or the west. This is maybe why it constantly changes directions. It faces all directions and is influenced by them all. If there would be a pill whose effect would make you experience a century, Turkey would be the first one to swallow it. It has multiple anxieties like catching up with today's technologies and it is a very anxious country due to the problems it encountered during the process of westernization, as well as due to the desires and pleasures coming from its empirical past. The nomadic roots of its society still persist in the states of mind of its members.

J.S. Who are the artists of your generation that you feel close with their attitudes?

:MK When we started mentalKLINIK we had affinities with relational aesthetics but we usually found it over-optimistic. Our approach was to move beyond criticizing the present times and beyond drowning in the hole of criticism; we aimed at expanding chasms which bear new possibilities and at weaving new web of relations. Of course, we paid attention not to over-idealize it either. We reflex by reflecting our times. We emphasize the meaninglessness, futility of anxieties by rendering them visible. When we think of the artists of our generation Douglas Gordon, Ugo Rondinone, Martin Creed and Doug Aitken are the ones that comes to our mind.

J.S. Why not creating a real Mental Klinik space that would be a kind of factory of ideas that you would share with others?

:MK If you have a space, welcome, we'd do it! Perhaps we will rent out Andy Warhol's factory once we make enough money; or better, do you know of any studios for sale in China?

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Actually we would love to work in and occupy such a space temporarily if somebody wishes to lend it to us for a while. We really fancy the idea and all proposals are welcomed!

J.S. Two of your works Cheater and Liar are dealing with falsification. Do they have to do with the emotion of Poker games? Is art about the alchemy of changing lies into truth or fake into real?

:MK In our opinion art has its own reality. We never refer to such a transformational power of art. But we rather regard it as an area where it is possible to create a reality of its own. We always examine the tension between imagining and realizing something and that is what we did also in our works like Cheater and Liar. To experience falsification many times in that process and to create works with the aesthetical elements conditioned by it... our works were the result of a very long process which had many fluxes and refluxes... To subvert one another...When we work as a duo we subvert each other and this subversion informs our process.

Actually more than changing lies into truth or fake into real, our work generates a sense of playing a poker game; you never know if your counter-partner is bluffing or not, if what s/he says is true or not... and the tension in the game, even the game itself feeds on that ambiguousness...