

Banking on Art in Istanbul

TÜLAY GÜNGEN, GENERAL MANAGER YAPI KREDİ KÜLTÜR SANAT YAYINCILIK TALKS TO DARRELYN GUNZBURG

When Kazım Taşkent, founder of the Yapi Kredi Bank, opened his first bank branch in Istanbul, one of his priorities was to invest in culture and the arts. Darrelyn Gunzburg spoke with Tülay Güngen, General Manager of Yapi Kredi Cultural Activities, Arts and Publishing, in November 2008, about how Kazım Taşkent's dream has been realised.

Darrelyn Gunzburg: Rather than supporting other arts organisations, Yapi Kredi Bank has taken an active role in accumulating and presenting art to the people of Turkey. How did this begin and why?

Tülay Güngen: The first years of the Republic of Turkey were all about trying to nourish a newly built culture. Turkey was a new country founded in 1923, replacing a worn-out and tired empire. Kâzım Taşkent founded Yapi Kredi Bank in 1944. He was genuinely philanthropic and he always saw Yapi Kredi as a bank of culture and arts. In his speech at the opening of the first branch he said: 'Big institutions like ours have two duties: the first is accomplishing its professional goals and the second is performing its social duties. We chose culture and art. That is why we are the bank of culture and art'. He

Tülay Güngen in her office at YKY, Istanbul, November 2008. Photo: Yapi Kredi Cultural Activities, Arts and Publishing Archive – Hakan Ezilmez.



believed we had to educate our people in terms of art and culture and, through Yapi Kredi, he took on the task of bringing art to the street.

DG: What is your role in this organisation?

TG: Yapi Kredi Cultural Activities, Arts and Publishing is a wholly owned subsidiary of Yapi Kredi Bank and I am the general manager. I have only been in this position for six and a half months. Previously I worked in Yapi Kredi Bank for 15 years and I was, for some time, a board member of this subsidiary.

Yapi Kredi Bank considers this entity as a strong and important part of its corporate identity. We organise all our exhibitions and events on behalf of Yapi Kredi Bank but in a liberal and independent way. I think our credibility comes from that independence as well as the quality of the work itself. We present a yearly programme to the board members of the company and organise the various events after their approval.

DG: So in this current economic crisis, if something happened to the bank, would Yapi Kredi Cultural Activities, Arts and Publishing still continue?

TG: It would be affected but on the other hand our activities would continue. Our cultural activities are concerned with two different fields. The first is publishing; mostly literature, history, arts and philosophy. And the second is opening exhibi-

From the 'Roman Portraits from Aphrodisias' exhibition at Yapi Kredi Vedat Nedim Tör Museum, 26 Sept. 2008 – 25 Jan. 2009. Photo: Yapi Kredi Cultural Activities, Arts and Publishing Archive – Hakan Ezilmez.

tions, and organising seminars, meetings. We try to relate them to each other, that means we publish books which come out of contemporary art talks or we hold talks on the books we have published. When we open an exhibition we hold seminars on it, we run workshops for children and offer guided tours and lectures by specialists. We also have a magazine, first published in 1974, called *Sanat Dünyamız*, which means *Our Art World*. In this magazine we focus not just on the art works themselves but how the art world functions, the dynamics of institutions, artists, art critics, curators and the philosophy that goes with it, the historical underpinnings of art.

DG: Does Yapi Kredi have a permanent collection like other art galleries and museums, and if so, how do you expand the collection?

TG: Yes, we do have a permanent collection and we do expand it. For example, in 2007 there were some additions from local artists to our painting collection. We make sure that whatever we acquire will augment our collection. Many people donate artefacts or documents which have historical value, like letters or collections of books. Yapi Kredi Vedat Nedim Tör Museum houses Yapi Kredi's collections of antique



From contemporary artist Gülsün Karamustafa's exhibition titled 'sineması/cineması', Yapi Kredi Kâzım Taşkent Art Gallery, 26 October–25 November 2007. Photo: Yapi Kredi Cultural Activities, Arts and Publishing Archive – Hakan Ezilmez.

coins and medallions, and an ethnographic collection. These are protected in specially designed storage areas, and are put on display in Turkey and around the world on a rotational basis. The antique coin collection of the museum consists of 55 thousand pieces, making it the third largest coin collection in the world. We possess, as well, an important, growing painting collection, comprising more than 1260 works by Turkish and foreign artists. We also have an archive and a research library with around 5,000 original manuscripts.

DG: It sounds like an extremely active programme of education. How do you decide what exhibitions to create?

TG: We have a committee who choose the themes of the exhibitions. The first gallery has an archaeological theme and every year we present one or two exhibitions with pieces from as far back as 12,000 years, through Neolithic, Phrygian, Trojan, Urartian, Byzantine, Seljuk, Ottoman to current times. We work closely with the heads of the excavations and collect artefacts from many different museums and collectors. In the same hall we have ethnographical exhibitions. Last year it was the story of the banknote; the year before it was the history of communication; prior to that we ran one on perfume and perfume bottles. Our current exhibition is on time and clocks. The second gallery is focused on contemporary art in Turkey, mainly solo exhibitions of artists who have been active

in the 1990s. They each produce a site-specific piece of new work especially for these exhibitions, mostly installations, and these are accompanied by monographs of the life and works of the artists. The third gallery is focused on special projects such as 'life-and-works' type of exhibitions or internationally renowned photographers like Salgado, Robert Capa, Bruno Barbey, Ara Güler or authors like Pessoa and Nazım Hikmet.

DG: Do any of the Yapi Kredi exhibitions travel?

TG: We used to have two more galleries in other cities. They are no longer open. However, we lend pieces from our collections to other exhibitions. In 2006, we participated in an exhibition titled 'People and the City' held in Italy by UniCredit Group. The works of Turkish artists such as Devrim Erbil and Neşe Erdok were exhibited. We have sent pieces to Japan, Germany, Italy, Hungary, and Austria. We also have good working partnerships with countries that have cultural representatives here in Istanbul. We created a Joseph Beuys exhibition as well as an Otto Dix exhibition with the German Cultural Institute, an Andy Warhol exhibition with the American Cultural Institute. We also have a good rela-

tionship with the Austrians. So individual pieces do travel.

DG: How does this organisation differ from museums and galleries?

TG: Our exhibitions are free of charge and open seven days a week. We don't have a permanent exhibition, all of them are temporary. In the meantime, we are the largest publishing house in Turkey. 2010 will mark the publication of our three-thousandth book. This is an impressive figure for the Turkish book market. We have been publishing our exhibition books since the 1980s. Generally, we have bilingual publications on each of our exhibitions. Our philosophy and history books are used as text books in universities. I think this is a major feat. We are proud of what we are doing here. Now, especially with our contemporary work, we would like to be more present in the European art field.

DG: Thank you, Tülay. What Yapi Kredi is doing for the Turkish people is wonderful. I wish you all the best for its continued success.

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