

Catalog Essay

Dokunma

DOKU-N-MA (Don't Touch) Exhibition brochure, Istanbul, Turkey, 1999

Doku=texture, dokuma=textile, dokunmak=to touch: like the work games of our playful title, the five artists in this exhibition enjoy working with contradictions and intersections, in their case between the historical traditions of weaving and fabric in Turkey and the conceptual complexities of contemporary art. Belkis Balpınar works the most intimately with tradition. Her contemporary kilims are based on old techniques, but they move the flat surface into space to become sculpture. Bubi transforms rags and other materials into an objective abstract shape that echoes Islamic interlace in its emphasis on a surface that denies meaning to the uninitiated. İnci Eviner uses leather combined with copper to reference Anatolian traditions in their comment on the pain of the present. Fusun Onur wraps tulle and other light fabrics on chairs, changing them from prosaic and practical forms to soft, elusive mysteries. Finally, Suzy Hug-Levy weaves wire into mysterious unraveling shapes whose shadows are as real as their physical realities.

All of these artists are connected to Turkey's complex historical art traditions, but in their contemporary work they create an intense confrontation with the world as it is now.

Today, there is no clear dividing line between reality and fiction, past and present, good and bad, decoration and art. Particularly in these last days of the century, we have only an elusive and momentary idea of what we desire. All of these artists are aware of the fleeting nature of today's realities, so they have altered the traditional structures and frames of both art and textiles by means of technical experiments and layered references. We cannot physically touch these textiles, these textures, these texts – we cannot read one fixed meaning in them. They do not offer instant enlightenment or transformation, but they do offer fragments of knowledge and experience that bind us to the past, expand the present, and lead us to the future.