

## CATALOG ESSAY

**Oyunlar, Oyuncaklar, Çocuklar, Savaş, Sevgi, (Games, Toys, Children, War, Love), 1999-2000 (Tomur Atagök) Ankara, 2000**

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*Susmayı, kendi kabuğunun içine  
çekilmeyi bir yaşam biçimi  
bir kişilik simgesi olarak  
benimseyen insanlar vardır  
Özgürlükleri e silahları konuşmamaktır  
Her adaletsizlik, onların  
eylemsizliğinden güç alır biraz da ...  
Uğur Mumcu  
Yeni Ortan 20 Ocak 1975*

*There are those people who have preferred a lifestyle of silence,  
pulling inward as a personal symbol.  
Their freedom and weapons do not speak.*

*Every injustice takes strength, in a  
way, from their passivity.*



On 24 January, 1993 Uğur Mumcu , a famous journalist and researcher on terrorism in Turkey was assassinated by a car bomb in Ankara. A year later Tomur Atagök began the series "Games, Toys, Children, War, Love." In the first piece, she wrote this quote from Uğur Mumcu, barely legibly, buried in a grey field. Strwn across the field are metal scraps like violently wrenched out staples that seem to invoke the violence of

Mumcu's death. The second piece in the series had a complete heart, and a brighter tone, already a less despairing feeling. As the series developed, (it now includes 10 large and 40 small works) the artist kept the heart, although it is usually only partially visible as a double or single curve. Against that motif are images of war and love including the silhouettes of guns, toy soldiers, bones, paper doll cutouts, hands, dots, crosses, and crescents. In addition the artist uses stones, sticks, feathers, and glossy advertising images of beautiful people. Scattered throughout many of the works are poetic phrases, of various moods, hopeful, sad, cynical.

The series as a whole is an homage to Mumcu, but also a response to him. Atagök has decided not to remain passively silent in the face of her own distress at his death and her support for his ideas. In one large piece she expresses her feelings about Turkey's present conditions. In "Altın Demokrasi|" "Altın" can mean both gold and below in Turkish, and she separates "ası" so it becomes rebel. Below this are the faces of youth at leisure, but their faces have been partially painted over. The point is clear: pursuit of pleasure and comfortable materialism corrupts democracy and it is necessary to resist that corruption.

Writing in these works is a formal part of the image as in the letter "S" or it is an elusively hard to read fragment and partner to the visual vocabulary of the image. There are quotes from Fyodor Dostoevsky, Virginia Woolf, Omar Khayyam, and Sylvia Plath, as well as some fragments written by the artist. Thus in one piece, we read, with difficulty and with some creative repetitions added by the artist "Oh love could you and I with him(with him conspire to grasp this sorry sorry scheme scheme of things entire, Would not we shatter it to bits-and then re-mould it nearer to the Heart's desire." In another work we read the last words of Fyodor Michailovich in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment: "But what were all those past torments anyway, what did they all amount to . . . Life had come to take the place of dialectics. . ."

But these quotes are all subsumed by the power of Atagök's visual forms. The intersection of life and death is a constant theme. In one image a heart seems to explode underground within the shanks of another heart. In others the silhouettes of toy soldiers, guns, and vertebrae, both whole and fractured point, to how easily children's games slip easily into violence. The toy soldiers are based on the free cardboard fighters which are given out with newspapers. Grids of blue dots cancel out life in these works.

But there are also images of hope. The juxtaposition of the cross and the crescent, which Atagök actually saw on a church in Hungary, here suggests harmony among different people. A symbol of intersection, a geometric form with six intersecting lines also suggests connection, in opposition to conflict.

Symbols of the earth, stones, bones, and feathers, suggest burial and excavation while pregnant women refer to new life. Many of these pieces have long hands reaching for each other, trying to join together .Finally, a single plastic hand writes in reference to Khayyam's poem : "The moving finger writes and having writ, moves on...." suggesting the fact that we cannot change history.

These works are full of complex references, but in the end they stand without need of explanation, as visually stunning works based on the profound passions of one of Turkey's foremost contemporary artists.