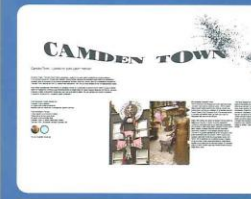




Interview: Rana Korgül
 Photos: Osman Akan archive
 Portraits: Lori Ellen Kaufman



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A Turkish Artist in New York OSMAN AKAN

Osman Akan is an artist who studied design and new media, is known particularly in the field of new media and for his use of unusual materials. Exhibited in public and corporate places, his works are impressive and thought-provoking. He is environment-friendly and respectful. Take a glimpse into his world of design mingled with the arts through our pleasant chat filled with lights...

Rana Korgül: Why are you in New York?

Osman Akan: This is a question almost every New Yorker asks oneself almost every day for one reason or the other. The answers are various and mine can be summed up like this -- at least for today: I have grown very accustomed to it and I am scared to go elsewhere!

What can you tell us about the art / design adventure you started years ago?

I studied graphic design at Bilkent University, department of design and architecture. After that, I first went to France and then to the US. I lived in New York in the beginning, then I followed my then-current girlfriend and moved to Los Angeles. First I started taking courses at the Arts Center School of Design; then I got into California Institute of the Art (CalArts) and got my MFA in "Critical Studies" and "Integrated Media". When the school ended, so did my scholarship and I started working. I worked as an art director at a Silicon Valley company engaged in establishing and developing TV-like networks in the computer environment.

The systems we developed back then later became the foundation of many cellular networks. I quit work a few years later, moved back to New York and focused on art. I also started teaching, which led to the current order of things.

What do you design now?

If you mean graphic design, almost nothing. Although rarely, I mostly do design management in the creation of visuals for human rights organizations.

I would like to learn about the notion behind your art...

Every generation produces works with the materials available to it. The generation before us used cinema and then television, and my generation deals with computer and information. While the information age connects us with each other or with other things at the speed of light, this new lifestyle estranges us to other things. A good example is the man's relationship with the nature. This is actually the reason why some of my works are themed around the harvest time, sowing and reaping, which seem like almost obsolete methods to us now. Information we receive in the form of lights on the screen distances us from the object itself.

It is impossible to remain indifferent to those lights. They are so impressive visually...

They really are. Let's take my work titled "Harvest", for instance; when we look at it we see fiber optic cables fastened like wheat bales. Today, most of us have a memory not of the wheat itself, but its image from the screen. These bales are a reference to this predicament.

What are you affected by when you draw?

Every time I start a new project, I get myself a new sketchbook, into which I put the notes, drawings and information about the project. All these notes and drawings serve as a record of the entire process; the project undergoes and they may differ in almost every project depending on the content. So, it is hard to say that I am affected by this or that in particular.

You use various artistic disciplines in your works such as sculpture, video, animation, and so on... Which disciplines and themes do your current works concentrate on? I could say that I am rather producing installations and sculptures lately. These are mostly exhibited in public places.

The materials you use are somewhat unusual. How do you decide on the materials and why?

Mostly I use fiber optic cables. At times, I use filters and glasses that produce a different reflection of the light. The location where the installation will be placed and how long it will be there can be major factors in determining the material to be used. The relationship of the installation location with the sun is very critical for me. Sometimes the commissioned project has its own restrictions. For example, I did a project for a hospital in Miami several months ago. The sculpture commissioned was also supposed to serve as a wall. Something like that suddenly narrows down

your material options. But of course I enormously enjoy producing interesting and attractive works within the frame of such restrictions. Moreover, I certainly try and work with natural and environment-friendly materials.

Going back to those lights you just mentioned, do you think it could be suggested that graphic works and lightings have an attractive and impressive power upon people?

I suppose they do. One day I received an email. A guy wrote that he was so much impressed by one of my works that he had proposed to his girlfriend.

Right... Do you try to give a message via your works?

As far as I am concerned, giving a message is a very straightforward and arrogant stance. I have no such desire. But I could say I want to create associations with certain topics, and provoke certain questions in the audience.

What are you currently working on?

Right now I am working on a sculpture commissioned for the city of Denver. When completed, it will be quite a big sculpture. I designed it using stainless steel, glass and light-sensitive filters. It is made of surfaces that reflect sunlight in different colors depending on the angle at which the viewer is looking.

I wonder if there is a trend, a fashion for designs commissioned for public places?

In the case of America, we see works pursuing environmentally compatible new materials particularly in California, New Mexico and other states including Colorado. There is a new group of artists trying to utilize new energy resources such as the solar energy and wind energy, and taking care to use recovered materials - my works also fall into this group.

Your works are installed in various parks and public places in the US.

Yes, they are at the Franconia Sculpture Park, in Minneapolis, Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York, and at the entrance of the botanic gardens in Denver.

There is a growing interest in contemporary and modern art in Turkey.

What are your thoughts on that?
 As a person engaged in this discipline, I am certainly pleased with this development. Although I follow-up the works produced, I don't really know how they are consumed.

What do you think can be done to support the development of contemporary art in Turkey?

As an artist exhibiting artworks in public places, I believe that art must enter the platform, the street where people live. I think this aspect is just in toddling stage in Turkey.

What is Osman Akan's mission in life?

It is not "Live fast, die young!" thankfully! Otherwise, I would have been a big loser. "Live good and produce good things!" sounds nicer. I have a three-year old daughter, Leyla. She has become the entire mission. I also have daily fights with my ego to avoid this situation.

We know that you teach at a school in New York. What do you teach?

I am not really able to teach at present, but I did for quite a while. I usually taught two and three-dimensional design. Galleries will soon open again and great activities will start at Eyebeam and BAM. Recently, I started fast cycling at the park in response to my wife Lesley's pressure that I am now a middle-aged man and should take good care of my health. But I complain that my bike is not good enough and evade it.

Are there any artists, designers, individuals that you follow?

There is a continuous activity in New York. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to say that I follow-up what goes on around, rather than a specific artist.

Are there any plans to return to Turkey on the horizon?

Not in sight at the moment.

I wish there were, we really need artists like you here in Turkey!

Thank you, Osman, for this pleasant and informative chat...

Camden Town--an eccentric center of attraction
 The European hub of Punk and Goth culture British culture with a highly liberal structure: a second-hand stores and inexpensive world of tattoo and piercing fans... Camden Town is, if these ascriptions and offers so much more.

Camden Town as it once was

In fact, Camden Town was not really a concealed place was a run-down site, a path for northbo known as the World's End Pub, the Mother R was the only remarkable structure in the area when the region was connected to the River 1820. With the shipment of goods and loads untouched location instantly became an invite greatest support from horses in the construction and these four-legged faithful servants which it is today have always been credited. The cool the 1950s at full speed. The buildings quickly the canals and the region slowly lost from the of roads. Once home to an active commercial region forlorn.

Having rocked the world in the 1960s with the influence of the Beat Generation trends at Bowie, with his unique style, had become a far large crowds behind them with their music, a punk and new wave trends in fashion. Just then in Camden, the district that was not really far its own devices. With the efforts of three your left to decay were allocated to young artists a This decision bore its fruits very shortly.

Artisans were soon joined by small antique sil clothes, and courtiers selling cheap food prep London to give it a shot. Painted by the local at the entrance of the district and inscribed w since then, been a landmark of Camden. Wit youth, Camden Town soon became a spot Lo Visitors bought inexpensive and absorbing cl anything to be found in London, and looked it up of resident young musicians, punks, studs countries. By mid-1980s, Camden Town flou opened around it and has indisputably beco

Camden's rise did not end there. A compre the district in 1990, restoring buildings. Most days a week. The world's most famous musi headquarters to this trendsetter district. Proud London, opened a very impressive art gallery t at the Stables Market.

Design agencies, advertisers, and creative m the new residents of the region. Yet, what goe time, a fire interrupted Camden's happy days Camden Town burned into flames. More thar to ashes in the region that was home to more of the largest-scale fires in the history of Lon district to recover and recapture its former viv

CAMDEN