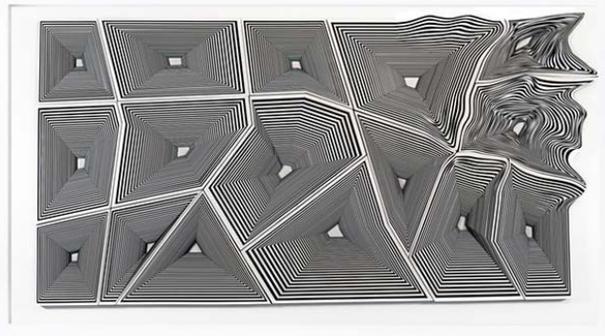


SEÇKIN PIRIM

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Please tell us a little about yourself. What brought you to the world of contemporary art and how did you start?

I was born and raised in a small neighborhood, Kuzguncuk in Istanbul. Kuzguncuk is a place where numerous painters, sculptors, architects, poets and writers live and have their art studios. Everything started when I was 8 or 9 years old, I started working in the artist studio of a sculptor whom I look up to. He was my first maestro. I envied him, what he was doing, everything in his studio and I wanted to use all of them. The only thing I did when I was a child was to draw. My maestro noticed it and taught me everything along the way. Then he got me in the fine arts high school exam, and I finished high school by studying painting in a visual art school.

Of course, my only dream was to be a sculptor and for this reason I only attended the sculptor exam of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. I got into this department and graduated at 2000 by also taking my master at the same department. I hold my first solo exhibition at my senior year at university. Spending so much time at studio when I was a child caused many things to happen earlier than usual in the professional sense. I have never done anything other than art since then. And, I hope it goes like this.



What is the primary role of an artist? How do you describe yourself in the context of challenging people's perspectives via your work?

For me, being an artist was like a destiny. Since I started going to the studio, I have never had doing anything else on my mind. This had a huge role on my life, but I have never thought if I had a particular role on life. The only thing that was on my mind was to create. And, it is still more or less the same. An artist's job is to create, he/she presents his/her troubles, social issues and ideology to life, to the audience with his/her art. The works that come out with its naturality always find an audience that it will affect. I do not start out to impress someone or to have my works appreciated.

My only focus is my works. I create in a meditative way by retiring into my shell. This natural process, as I've said, already attracts people who ask the same questions as me.

How do you deal with the conceptual difficulty and uncertainty of creating work?

When I come up with a work, my source of inspiration is usually the problems that I try to deal with in my own life. Because I know that someone else has the same problem with me somewhere in the world. My philosophy is from one to whole. And, my works are parallel to my life. When I'm happy, my works become colorful and, when I give into pessimism, my works get dark. That's why, I let my soul deal with the first moment of occurrence in this creation process. It already knows what to do and works come out naturally.

What inspires you? Let's talk about your frameworks, references and process.

Looking and seeing excessive amount of time is my source of inspiration. The things I see, and look make me ask questions. And, the answers of these questions create my sculptures. Of course, my inspirations change from time to time. As my thoughts change. I look at the artists I am impressed, especially their lives. It also excites me to look through how they go through these processes.

Let's talk about your career, or if you prefer artistic journey. What were your biggest learning and hiccups along the way?

As I said a few questions ago, I found myself at an early age, holding an exhibition in an art world. My first exhibition was when I was 20 or 21. Due to my character and spirit, I did not have the courage of youth. I always approach so many things with hesitation. I have repeatedly questioned all the exhibitions and sculptures I have made. My maestro would always repeat that I had to work hard.

This form of uncourageous approach had challenged me mentally a lot at that time. Then, I had to make money. But I didn't want to earn money by doing something other than making sculptures; referring to my years at university. I saw posters of sculpture contests around, and there were some pretty good prizes. I had a comfortable life by winning almost all of these competitions in 2-3 years, which I entered to make money. But later on, I realised the more important part of these competitions in creating my career outside of money. Since all these competitions took place in the press and I won many of them, people started to wonder and look at my works more. During this period, I made my first gallery deal. And the first breaking point of my career started like this.

What are you looking for when you look at other artists' work? Which shows, performances and experiences have shaped your own creative process? Who are your maestros?

When I look at an artist's work, I always look at his/her life too. I look at his/her previous works, I wonder about his/her life. Art is not a job for an artist. You cannot retire from it. You would walk side by side with it until you die. Which is why, art is a lifestyle for me. For this reason, I cannot evaluate an artist's work apart from his/her life. Only after this, I evaluate his/her work. I never look at works with a sharp distinction as good or bad. I can never be ruthless for anything that is made with hard work. For me, the only thing I can say is whether it is close to my soul. There are a lot of works that impress me as a sculpture. Eduardo Chillida always make me feel good. Whenever I feel bad, I look at his works.

How does your interaction with a curator, gallery or client evolve, from the (brief) initial interface to working-relationship?

When all of your life is art and you spend seven days a week with this, you meet many people on this journey. Especially, I love getting to know people. In fact, I have met almost everyone who has added my work to their collection so far and I love this particularly. I like to hear from their own mouths with what feelings they have met with that work. I never turn these relationships into a financial interest; never try to market my works myself to them. I only establish a friendship with them.

Even when the ones that are closest to me want to get a new work from me, I want them to talk to my gallery (C24 Gallery). In this process, many gallerist, curators and collectors entered my life. I still keep in touch with almost all of them. I believe everyone has an impact on each other's success. It is indispensable for me to discuss changing ideas and to talk about art.



Think of the biggest professional risk you've taken. What helped you take that risk?

As I've mentioned a few questions earlier, I didn't have a very brave youth. I have always had an anxious life. In this case, of course, it was really hard for me to take risks. That's why, I've never taken any huge risk. But, for the first time in these years, I started to fine down this side of me. I can feel it inside. And, I think I am going into some decisions where I might need to take risks. We should talk about this again in a few years.

What is the best piece of advice you've received? Any mentor, curator or gallerist who deserves a special mention for furthering your journey?

First one, of course, my maestro. If it wasn't for him, it would be too late for me to start this journey, or it would never happen. I learned the plastic problems of the work and the essentials of the sculpture from him. Every techniques, materials and tools. In the years of university, I've met with a lecturer whom I call my second maestro. And, he told me what art is, showed me that a sculpture is not just a form. For this reason, both of them have been very influential on my current art adventure. I have always benefitted from both of their advices.

Tell us about your art studio, what kind of place is it? Could you describe your usual workday?

I go to the artist studio every day of the week, including Sunday. I am very disciplined in this regard, as in every profession, I think discipline is also a must in art creation. Even if I have no work to do, I would read a book or look at the ceiling and think. I draw sculptures in space. Music is my most important motivation in the studio. My art studio is enjoyable. It is my meditation area where I feel the freest and safest.

Are you more of a studio artist or naturally collaborative by nature? How do you feel about commissions?

As I've said, I love being in the art studio and working alone. But from time to time, I've had artist friends with whom I made collaborative works. Or sometimes we produced works together at symposiums. But frankly, I prefer being in the art studio and being alone.

Regarding commissions, it is one of the most enjoyable and intellectually versatile process for me to produce site-specific works. When I design sculpture for a specific place, I work with engineers and architects. Apart from the intellectual part of the work, there are a lot of things to be solved technically. Like the static calculations of the place and the sculpture need to be done, when you make a 20-ton sculpture. Sometimes this situation does not set you free, of course, but it turns into different ways of thinking for me and evaluating different processes that I did not think about sculpture becomes one of the parts I enjoy the most.

In general, I only say yes to projects when they show me the place and ask me for a sculpture from there. I don't do the work when I think the other party might be involved in the creation process. Because then there is no point in asking me for a sculpture. Of course, I listen to the information about the place from them. I capture various starting points from their explanations. It is important for me that they let me do the remaining part.

What was your first sale? Do you handle the commercials yourself or is it outsourced to a gallery/agent?

My first sale was at the first exhibition I did while I was a student. In fact, I had never even thought that sculpture and art were something to be sold until that moment. I was already sculpting all the time and the idea of selling them was not in my mind. I was doing it with a feeling of hunger. My feeling at the first exhibition was just to share them with the audience and see their reactions. Of course, later on, I realized that these sales are needed to continue my profession.

Still, the thing I am most happy about in a sale is to earn the money to make a new sculpture. It doesn't seem right to me that an artist does a self-promotion. Or, it is not something that I am capable of. I worked with galleries from the beginning. Currently, the C24 Gallery in New York is my main gallery and manager. I only want to stay in the studio and create. Its marketing, sales, customer relations, and the exchange of money is not an area I want to be very involved in. Frankly, being involved in these things takes me away from my job. All I can do myself is to share my works on social media.

How does your audience interact and react to the work you put out into the world?

After I create my sculptures, when I leave them to the gallery, they now create their own area of freedom. They now establish a relationship with the audience apart from me. I have never insisted that the audience understand the same thing that I tried to express. In fact the opposite, I would like the person who looks at my work to go on his /her own journey with my sculpture. My sculpture should be a tool in their life. But of course, it has been many audiences who share my problem and have the same feelings as me. It is more difficult to establish a connection between an abstract work and the audience than a figurative work. But it seems more cognitive to me. I want the audience to ask a lot of questions to my work and find their own answers.



What are you working on now? What's coming next season?

I am working on the exhibitions that we have planned to have this year and postponed. One of the most exciting one is outdoor sculpture exhibition that I will do in a couple of ancient towns in Turkey under UNESCO protection. Another one is of course the exhibition that I will open in C24 Gallery. I look forward to returning the exhibition in New York when everything is fine. Meanwhile, we are in a project with a worldwide known brand. Unfortunately, I cannot give any name and details before the project is completed according to the contract, but it is very exciting. I hope we see the results together when they are finished.

What were you working on when the lockdown was announced?

When the lockdown was announced, I was working on the exhibitions I will do in 2020 both for Turkey and New York.

The idea of secluding yourself into home or studio is something I love. Only when this decision belongs to me. Unfortunately, such a mandatory and uncertain situation has mentally impeded my production and concentration for the moment. After all this, it will likely be reflected in my productions. I don't know how, but I am certain that it will. It is impossible for this process not to turn into a series of works, since all my works are derived from my experiences and their results. I have a lot of questions for my next works in my head. I think we will see the answers when I finish my works in studio and exhibit them.

Human beings quickly forget about their bad experiences and the lessons they need to learn from them. In the early days of the pandemic there was the feeling that when this pandemic is over, many people's mindset will change, but frankly the fact that people will return to their desperate and insensitive lifestyles after everything is completely normal scares me. I hope for a future with a less consumption, where everyone wish the same and approach nature with respect, they have a more humane lifestyle and the first goal is to be a good person.

How has this affected your practice and plans?

Apart from the emotional part of the work, of course, it affected the physical plans quite a lot. I had to postpone the large-scale outdoor sculpture exhibition for which I am most excited for and would do in the three ancient cities of Turkey under UNESCO protection to the next year. Also, at the beginning of this process, I was at the studio in New York and I prepared the exhibition that I will make in my main gallery, C24 Gallery in New York. With the opening of the exhibition, lockdown was announced, and the gallery had to close.

What would elevate artists' life during this period?

I leave aside the economic problem, which is a big problem for every field of work. Because this is a different and a long issue. In the context of feelings, we are going through a period where we encounter many things for the first time. We may, personally, meet different sides of us that come to light for the first time. I think everyone is at the stage of questioning and learning these feelings right now. After all this has passed, the artist, artwork and audience will come together again as before. All the posts, live broadcasts, artwork visuals, exhibitions made on social media are some benefits in closing all gaps for now. Also, of course there are pleasant sides.

For instance, seeing the studio of an artist you are very curious about. But I feel that this will only be limited to such periods. I think that physical closeness with an artwork and being in front of it is not an emotion to be replaced with another alternative. Especially as a sculptor, I would like to watch the sculpture in its own area of freedom, to touch it secretly, to perceive the material. These are not feelings that we can experience in a virtual environment. Of course, this may not be valid for artists who used social media for artistic expression before. This was already their material.

As I said at the beginning, it has worn these areas out economically the most. When everything gets better, it will gain its old dynamic.

What kind of critical inputs does the art world need at this moment to overcome the loss of income and opportunity as a direct result of the worldwide lockdowns?

The subject here is the artist. None of these institutions you mention means nothing without an artist. For this reason, my goal would be to first ensure that the artists can survive. The artist continued to produce in every field and at all times. Even in the war, artists did not stop their production, but also have lost a lot. In this case, as I said, institutions or collectors must absolutely support the artist in order to survive.

<https://asiancurator.com/turkish-contemporary-artist-seckin-pirim/>