

Examining Themes of Freedom and Censorship

By Victoria Zunitch, January 17, 2019



PHOTO BY VICTORIA ZUNITCH

Among the works by Banu Cennetoglu, right, on display at SculptureCenter are bound copies of every newspaper published in a year in several countries.

If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear, does it make a sound? If a fact is erased from a website, or if an error is erased and the erasure isn't recorded, will anyone know?

Artist Banu Cennetoglu raised these issues of the permanence and impermanence of information, especially news, in discussing her first solo exhibition in the United States at the SculptureCenter in Long Island City at an opening reception last Sunday.

Objects, images, texts, printed matter, sounds and video are Cennetoglu's materials. One of her projects is a video of 128 hours and 22 minutes, sounds and stills from her own life.

Another gathers all of the newspapers printed in a single country on a single day and then binds them together in somber black volumes with gold lettering to indicate date and volume, as they might be in a library.

"It started with my country because I was interested in this whole hierarchy of news making," she said. In that country, Turkey, she collected 209 newspapers and bound them in eight volumes.

"You can see both freedom of expression and censorship," Cennetoglu said — the self-censorship of apathy, of shrinking public interest in newspapers no less than the imposed censorship of government action.

The books are displayed in a solemnly lit room in the back of the gallery that feels like a sequestered holy room in a temple. As you enter, you see a mirror.

The piece, made in 2014 by Cennetoglu and Yasemin ...zcan, has been sandblasted with a question, the words curving in a squish across the top arch of the mirror. Effortful reading forces you to attend to its message, just as some public speakers force a crowd to shush up and listen by speaking in a whisper. It asks, “What is it that you are worried about?”

Inside the room, a luminous, minimalist white table is at the center. A set of simple shelves is unnoticeable as it holds up a solid block of the black-bound volumes of newspapers. The creator herself assured the security guard that she would respect the rule: a maximum of four of books at a time to be opened and read after placing them carefully on the table.

Visitors perused the volumes, some of them young enough to make you wonder how often they’d ever seen an actual paper copy of a news publication before.

“I would like to be able to continue because in 50 years there will be no papers,” Cennetoglu told the Chronicle. She emphasized that not only will there be no newspapers printed on paper, but there will be only digital news, and there will be no paper left in her exhibits. She is taking no steps to preserve the paper. Both the print and the paper of newsprint decay notoriously quickly.

“Newspapers are already a dying medium, so it has a strong archival feeling even though what I was looking at was not very old, only 2014,” said Joseph Lalli of the Bronx, a lover of sculpture who attended the opening reception last Sunday for both the Cennetoglu exhibit and a sister exhibit, “In Practice: Other Objects,” both of which run through March 25.

‘Banu Cennetoglu’

When: Through Mon., March 25

Where: SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves St., Long Island City

Entry: \$10 suggested; \$5 students.

(718) 361-1750,

sculpture-center.org