7 Turkish Artists: Mike Mandel & Chantal Zakari

Project Description

The project concerns the social themes that define contemporary Turkey and specifically examines the imagery of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, its revolutionary leader after World War I. This project is a critical visual exploration on the meaning of Atatürk's imagery and how it is used in Turkish society today. He is seen as the link to Western culture. His image is used by the Kemalists as a symbol in opposition to the rise of the Islamist political movement. During a thirteen year period between 1997 and 2009, artists Zakari and Mandel—one



Turkish, one American—have become engaged in this project to better understand this conflict.

The artists have traveled all along the the Anatolian plateau from one small town to another looking for the many ubiquitous Atatürk sculptures. Sharia law prohibited figurative imagery as idolatrous. But after Turkish independence, the symbolic image of Atatürk became the icon that connected the citizen to the image of a new Turkey. After his death a great many sculptures of Atatürk were constructed across the countryside. Today when a Turkish town commissions an Atatürk sculpture, it is considered a patriotic accomplishment. Atatürk busts announce the entrance of every school. His image pervades Turkish life in the form of billboards, posters, banners, post cards, and logos for political parties and media. A variety of Atatürk iconic images communicate the military hero, father of the country, visionary thinker, planner, teacher, religious leader, even fashion model, as he moved to reinvent every facet of Turkish life including mode of dress. His framed picture is hung in thousands of offices, shops and homes throughout the country. With the present-day struggle between secularists, fascists, nationalists, Islamists, and the military, there is an increasing interest in using the image of Atatürk as an emblem for many political positions. Atatürk may have saved the country in 1923; today his imagery is a symbol caught between the disparate factions of Turkish society. The artists' recent book The State of Ata seeks to recognize the complex dynamics of a culture that is 99% Muslim but is committed to secularism. The State of Ata is a portrait of both sides of the body politic: that of the secular revolutionary hero as well as the Islamic scarf.

This work also recognizes the political battles within Turkish culture that revolve around feminine political fashion, the wearing of the scarf and even more extremely, the wearing of the çarsaf (the Turkish chador), the black body cover that leaves only a small opening for the eyes. Religious dress has become a political statement that counterpoints the sexually evocative styles from Europe and the West. Ironically, the most recent Islamist fashion is a new hybrid that puts sex back into religion. Dark eyeliner outlines the eyes and the scarves are designed in bright patterns of silk. Underneath, the hair is shaped into a bun to enlarge the size of the head and make the scarf even more prominent and bold. What was originally meant as a cover up has now been reinvented as sexual allure.

In the tradition of photographer Robert Frank's exposition of The Americans, the artists chronicle their experiences photographing the people in Turkey as they found them: students, families, couples, friends, on the street, in the office, or in the countryside. They photographed people, secular and Western, or religious and conservative in appearance. They made thousands of photographs, conducted interviews and collected found material from archives, gathering popular historical illustrations and other artifacts.

Many graphic representations of Atatürk that were originally based on photographs were later interpreted by many different artists along the way, each one more removed from the original. The result has created a body of public imagery that is often far removed from the likeness of Atatürk, but has become an image shorthand, an iconography similar to the imagery of other cult figures. As the country is physically divided, part in Europe, part in Asia, the unfolding story of Turkey is a powerful metaphor for the conflicts we face not only West and East, but also here within the United States between secularism, democracy and religion.

The Exhibition

A series of photographs, presented as single images, diptychs and triptychs, present images of Turkish culture, religion, Atatürk, schools, advertising and Western influenced popular culture. Forty-five busts reference the omnipresence of Atatürk statues throughout the country. Made out of resin plastic these busts suggest an imperfect, degraded presence. The artists have commissioned commercially produced Chinese oil paintings of their digitally collaged images creating a parallel with the imagery of Mao from the 1950's. The "made in China" paintings of Turkish society also recognizes the impact of the global economy within the country. The artists have collected and re-present here a series of vernacular artifacts, post cards that romanticize military service, and a collection of front pages of the tabloid press that document the spectacle of unintended consequences: Zakari herself was proclaimed by the Kemalist press "The Girl of the Republic" after she held up a picture of Atatürk to demonstrators at an Islamist march in Ankara. Over all, the installation reflects the complex relationship in Turkey between secularists, the Islamist movement, and military power.

The variety of visual strategies in the exhibition suggest the look of a group show. 7 Turkish Artists is a humorous reference to this mistaken first glance and challenges the viewer to come to terms with the complete title 7 Turkish Artists: Mike Mandel & Chantal Zakari. Until recently, Turkish artists who might wish to make art using imagery of Atatürk did so at the risk of violating laws protecting Atatürk's imagery punishable with years in prison. Ironically, for sculptors working in the Turkish public sphere the only opportunity for work was to receive a commission for an Atatürk statue for a government municipality. 7 Turkish Artists is also, therefore, a deadpan reference to the limitation of making art about Atatürk, especially by Turkish artists.

The Artists

Mike Mandel, an American photographer, comes to this project in the role of the outsider. At first overwhelmed by the relentless presence of Atatürk's imagery, his is a photographic journey of discovering exactly what is at stake. He has published nine photo-based books since the early 1970's, including *Myself: Timed Exposures*; 1971; Seven Never Before Published Portraits of Edward Weston, 1974; the Baseball-Photographer Trading Cards, 1975; and Making Good Time, 1989. In 1977 Larry Sultan and Mandel authored Evidence, a photo narrative comprised only of found images, which has been recognized as a seminal artists' book and a precursor to subsequent postmodern strategies of photographic practice. Evidence was re-published in 2004 by D.A.P. In 1989 Mandel authored Making Good Time, counter pointing photographic efficiency studies made for industry by Frank and Lillian Gilbreth in the early part of the 20th century with his own time/motion photographs.

Mike Mandel has been a recipient of several NEA grants and a Fulbright Fellowship. In 2005 his work was exhibited in the Berlin Biennale and recently in 2009, at PhotoEspaña in Madrid. He currently teaches within the photography program at The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston at the Tufts University campus.

Chantal Zakari is a Turkish-Levantine artist and a recent U.S. citizen. Her education since childhood was filled with propagandistic images of Atatürk designed to personify a sense of national identity. As an artist now living in the United States, she has a different perspective. Zakari was trained as a graphic designer and artist and received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She published *The Turk & The Jew* in 1998 with Mandel, a book based on the web-narrative by the same title, which was launched in 1996. In 2005, using a pseudonym, she self-published *webAffairs*, a documentary of a web community.

She has had solo shows of her work in the United States and in Turkey and her books are included in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Yale University, Institute of Network Cultures, Getty Research Institute, The Kinsey Institute Library and many private collections. She has given book readings in the form of performances in the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Canada and the United States. Zakari is a full-time faculty member in the Text and Image Arts Area at The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Color Photographs

Lambda Digital Prints sizes vary from 12" x 36", 16" x 36", and 16" x 20" All prints are untitled Edition of 3 \$1,500 each

















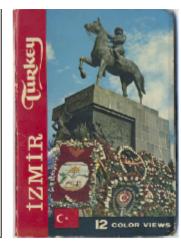
Postcards on a rack

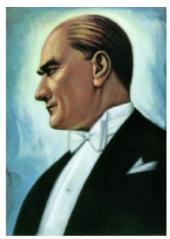
4" x 6" found postcards from the beginning of the Atatürk cult 1950 to contemporary designs currently available Displayed on a 5.5' tall spinning rack Unique \$10,000 for installation

Sampling of postcard images:



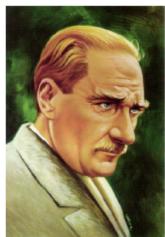




















Silver Gelatin Prints

4" x 5" Polaroid Negatives, 16" x 20" Silver Gelatin Prints Edition of 3 \$1,500 each or \$7,500 for set of 6 (2 not featured)



Farmer's market in Sivrihisar, east of Ankara



Eceabat, in front of the Yapı ve Kredi Bankasi



Ankara, Zafer Çarsısı, Victory Shopping Center



A few blocks away from Chantal's house, Izmir

Oil Paintings

24" x 36" Oil Paintings

Some painting compositions done from digital collage, some from single photographs, all painted by commercial studios in China.

Unique

Office 1 and Office 2 \$7,500 for pair

Remaining paintings \$5,000 each



Office 2, 2009



Yellow print scarf, 2009



Young couple, 2009



Office 1, 2009



White scarf, 2009



Red scarf with flower pattern, 2009

Military Parade

24" x 36" Lambda Digital Prints Edition of 3 \$3,000 for all 3 prints





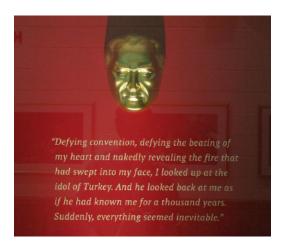
Military Parade, DVD

A collage of military parades, student pageants and displays of mass gymnastics celebrating National holidays
Video and sound installation on a small flatscreen
Approx. 27 min
Edition of 5
Not for Sale



Mask and Quote

Atatürk's death mask (found object) Vinyl lettering of a quote from Zsa Zsa Gabor's encounter of him Unique



Scarves

3 silk scarves from artists' personal collection Unique



Studio Fotogül

A collection of digitally composed military portraits from an Izmir photography studio Interspersed with vernacular postcards romanticizing military life Framed each 5" x 7" wall installation as shown Edition of 3 \$10,000 for installation



Busts

43 Transluscent Resin Busts 11"h x 7"w x 5.5"d Busts sit on transparent acrylic shelves 7"d x 10"w 30" x 40" Oil Painting, Made in China Unique \$20,000 for installation





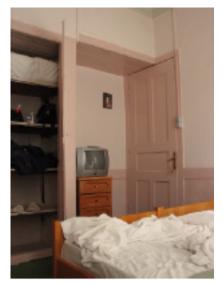
Sculpture lying down, 2009

The Hotel Project

5.5" x 7" Lambda Prints of images made in hotel rooms Edition of 3 \$2.500 for installation

In every hotel where we stay, we hammer a nail into the wall and install a framed Atatürk postcard. We wonder what will happen next:

- 1. The hotel staff might remove the picture to maintain the original condition of the room.
- 2. The staff will notice the new picture on the wall but will experience emotional conflict in removing it. One thought is that once Atatürk's portrait becomes part of the wall, it confers an official recognition: The Atatürk Room.
- 3. Because Atatürk is so much a part of the everyday visual landscape, no one will notice and the picture will simply remain on the wall.



Bursa, Yesil Kösk, room 2, 2007



Ankara, Otel Mercure, room 52, 1997



Afyon, Otel Dülgeroglu, room 211, 2007



Afyon, Oruçoglu Hotel, suite 401, 1997



Salihli, Hotel Berrak, room 110, 1997

Front Pages of Turkish Newspapers

Collection of 7 22" x 15" Turkish newspapers where the artists are featured on the front page

Plexiglass with vinyl lettering translations applied to the back of the surface Ankara photography, 11"x 14", August 1997

Framed Atatürk postcard in 15" x 15" x 4" plexiglass vitrine

Edition of 2 (1 artists' own copy)

\$20,000 for installation











Left to Right:

"Here is the GIrl of the Republic"

"She made everyone cry"

"Here is the courageous girl"

"Her plan to divide the country"









Left to Right:

"Nominated for the Atatürk peace prize"

"Chantal's plan backfired"

"Negative responses are increaing"

"A second brave heart from Izmir"

Book

The State of Ata 8 x 9.25 inches 272 pages, hardbound English with a Turkish translation Includes a 16 page insert Taxi Rides, a photo novella

Eighteen Publications, 2010 © Mike Mandel & Chantal Zakari distributed by D.A.P. New York



Available for purchase at the front desk.

Production

Paintings from Canvaz.com, Shenzhen, Guangdong, China

Chen Xiaojun Xiang Ming He Qiyin Yang Daqin Maben Zhu Hong

Paintings from Royal-Painting.com, Xiamen, China

Xiao Liu

Busts: Keanne Petrie, with special thanks to Dan Wills

DVD editing: Taylor McVay

Black and White Silver Gelatin Prints: Paige Mazurek

Military family portraits: Foto Gül, Izmir, Turkey

Lightjet prints: Dorian Color Lab, Arlington MA

Printing of vinyl lettering: Dollar Signs, Waltham MA

Installation: Vincent Marasa

Special Thanks

Jeff Lawrence from the Weekly Dig

Garett Yahn for constructing and installing the 4 foot baffle

Participants in the photographs for the Return of the Father project