

**THE
GLOBAL
ART
COMPASS**

● **NEW
DIRECTIONS
IN 21ST-
CENTURY
ART**

**ALISTAIR
HICKS**

Back in Germany I first came aware of Erek walking along Kassel's sixties shopping parade. He introduced himself with a deep throbbing bass beat that spilled out of the top floor of the department store I was passing into the everyday concrete jungle. It reminded me that I had read about an installation at C&A, so I saw or rather heard Erek's work for the first time at his Documenta installation.

Erek now lives near the Conservatory and School of Architecture in İstanbul at which he teaches sound as well as architectural design among other subjects. Rhythm is his calling card as befits a drummer in the rock group Nekropsi, but his gift comes in the way he makes us compare the information we receive through our different senses. His most famous series of works questions the way we measure the world. He allocates different values to rulers. He takes the rulers from our school days and he assigns them new meaning. One small perspex line-ruler instead of marking out the distance of a foot or thirty centimeters marks the way from Now to the End. A companion piece to *Ruler Now-End* (2011) is equally ambitious, *Ruler 0-Now* (2008). 'It is an agnostic thing,' the artist explains. 'What is zero? People are suspicious of zero. These rulers are not timelines themselves, they are simple timeline makers.'²⁵ Hours of a misspent youth trying to draw straight lines that were meant to take me into an impenetrable another world have equipped me to see the beauty of Erek's short cuts. Not that he is delivering permanent mathematical solutions, rather mocking the mind's inability to escape its own machinations, which is revealed most simply by *Circular Week Ruler* (2011). Here our existence is reduced to a perspex ruler. No longer is the ruler an instrument to lead us to the future. The week is shown as a tiny see-through circle. It only has two things written on it. The week begins with Monday and ends with the Week-end, and round and round we go. 'The week is artificial,' Erek maintains. 'It is man-made, so abstract.'²⁶ It is a structure devised to keep us on the tread-mill.

His business cards preceded Erdem Taşdelen (b. 1985, Ankara). I knew his cards before I knew him. I had read forty-eight different personalized cards before I met him in İstanbul at a lunch he gave where everyone had to eat and drink with their left hand. His cards warned me that gender was on the agenda. 'Erdem Taşdelen, unhappy queer,' I read. The next was more positive 'Erdem Taşdelen, eternal adolescent,' but the stream



Erdem Taşdelen
Erdem Taşdelen
2011, 48 individual business cards
in plexi sheets, 8,4 x 5,5 cm each

Erdem Taşdelen chooses a common way to represent himself, but he cannot choose just one self-portrait. He makes 48 business cards to describe some of his different sides.

of self-consciousness continued: walking cliché, drama queen, delusional lover and pretentious poseur (the last was on mauve card). I chuckled at 'Erdem Taşdelen, cynical artist', but of the forty-eight descriptions he had attributed to himself or himself, 'self-deprecator' seemed more revealing than 'cynical'.

The Turkish artist is addressing the Cartesian idea of self that has been reduced to the main stream Me, Me, Me culture, perpetrated and encouraged by movies, commercials and social networks and pointing out that it is falling apart at the seams. He has been living in Vancouver the last seven years for as he says, 'For a 22 year old, Canada seemed an easier bet.'²⁷ The artist explores this unraveling idea of self in *Dear*,



2010. This consists in a series of love letters, but one suspects they have never been sent as they are riddled with corrections and self-doubt. The writer's very essence seems to collapse to putty in front of our eyes. His laser printer and pen are sharpened to cut his own flesh, and as with Michelangelo and his marble slaves²⁸ he does not know where to stop. The very act of love spirals out of control, but love itself is held up to the mirror. The writer lacerates himself in his attempts to ingrati-

Erdem Taşdelen
Dear,
 2010, inkjet and ink on copy paper
 (24 letters, 47 pages), installation
 dimensions variable

Anyone who has really tried to
 write a love letter has been here.

ate himself with the loved one, but the result is not seductive, rather self-destructive. As with the business cards, Taşdelen's wallowing in the mire of his fictional self demands an assessment of the way we fit in, or don't fit in, with others. 'I am self-critical in everything I do,'²⁹ he says. His work asks us to take the same care with our own relationship to the world.

'Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.'³⁰ As some eighty members of the art world milled around looking for seats in Lale's, Marie Curie's words seem to hover above us. The down-to-earth restaurant was only a few hundred's walk across a no-man's land from the fair, Art International, down by the water at Hasköy, but the art world was lost. To add to our discomfort Erdem stood up and told us all that we had to eat with our left hands so that we could try and understand a left-handers' life.' Eating left handed and talking to Esra Aysun about the Museum of Innocence³¹ was a skill beyond me and my white shirt. In English we have turned the Latin word for left into a word that means things are not right - sinister. Erdem Taşdelen believes our limited ideas about the individual are sinister.

Merey Şenocak (b. 1993, Izmir) is equally blatant in her attack on the way we see ourselves. Her video which is made up of endless images of her is called *Corruption* (2014). She spews out of a printing machine. The results are pinned to the wall, are propped up in every conceivable position, until she is surrounded. She distorts her face for the camera as if she is an emoticon. She cannot keep up with herself: her image runs on regardless. Her image has a mind of its own.

I met Şenocak on my second visit to Cansu Çakar's cubbyhole of a studio in İzmir. She has worked together on projects and exhibitions with Çakar. Çakar plans to lead workshops during the Biennale, which will explore the traditional working methods she uses in her own work, but also question them as her map does. She has done similar workshops working with prisoners, the Biennale's will be with abused women. The feminism in her work is not always that evident, often more implied than vocal. It is revealed in flashes. She has portrayed women with broom/brush hands. For an 'objectifying eye' there is a certain confusion as functionalism and ornamentation are competing.