

## **Art and Methodology of Sculptor Füsün Onur in Contemporary Turkish**

### **Art**

#### **Authors**

Burcu Efsun Topalođlu Marlalı<sup>1\*</sup>

#### **Affiliations**

<sup>1</sup>Master's Program in Art and Culture Management, Graduate School of Social Sciences  
Yeditepe University, 34755, Istanbul, Turkey

\*To whom correspondence should be addressed; E-mail:

[burcuefsun.topaloglu@std.yeditepe.edu.tr](mailto:burcuefsun.topaloglu@std.yeditepe.edu.tr)

Preprint

## **Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the artistic career of Füsün Onur, a pioneer of Contemporary Turkish Art. Despite her recognition especially within the Turkish art scene, there has been no comprehensive academic study about Füsün Onur. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the development and significance of Onur's art within the contexts of her life, historical conditions and artistic movements, exploring her contributions to Turkish contemporary art through her innovative use of materials and techniques. Onur's artistic journey is examined chronologically. Various experimental stages she has undergone throughout her career were detailed. This study segments Onur's career by decades, examining and analyzing changing trends, material uses and techniques. The artist's relationship with different art movements, their impacts on her works and how often she charted her own course are discussed.

**Keywords:** Conceptual art; contemporary turkish art; füsün onur; minimalist art; sculpture

Preprint

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sculptor Füsün Onur, who has been influencing Turkish art for more than half a century and has rightfully earned the title of one of the pioneers of Contemporary Turkish Art, has become one of the significant artists recognized in Turkey as well as other countries today through her unique artistic language developed over the years through experimentation. Onur's practice, which doesn't fully conform to any art movement, her unwavering commitment to innovation through experimentation, and her inclusion of the viewer in the artwork, have secured her place in Turkish art history. This paper aims to explain Onur's works by establishing connections with the artist's life, other works, and the conditions of the period. This study aims to elucidate the significant role played by sculptor Füsün Onur in the development and diversification of Turkey's contemporary art scene in the 1970s, a time when it was not yet aligned with the global contemporary art landscape. Initially, the artist's early biography is presented. Following this, the conditions of the period when she began producing works as a young artist are briefly described to maintain focus on the main topic of this study, examining how these conditions influenced the art environment and Onur's art specifically. Subsequently, Füsün Onur's artistic career is researched in detail, covering all her various experimental phases.

## **RESULTS**

Artists and their works are in constant interaction with their surroundings. Whether working individually or participating in collective movements, artists exist in an environment filled with significant events, various artistic disciplines, and political changes. This interaction not only allows the artist to reflect personal experiences and observations in their works but also establishes a dialogue with the communities around them. Artists from different disciplines and people living in the same region share the same magazines or newspapers, thus having a common agenda in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. This demonstrates that art is not only a form of expression but also serves as a communication tool reflecting social, cultural, and political elements. Therefore, it is important to have a general understanding of the social, cultural, and political events of the artist's era. The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were periods of significant transformations in social life and the art scene in Turkey, marked by political and economic instability. Before

evaluating Füsün Onur's artistic life and works, it is essential to understand the general state of the country's art and cultural environment. Having lived in the same spot on the Bosphorus for 86 years, Onur observed modernizing Turkey from her unique perspective.

### Biography

This section provides a comprehensive biography of Füsün Onur, tracing her early years from childhood through her academic pursuits at the Academy. It continues with her studies in the USA for her master's degree, followed by her eventual return to Turkey.

Born on February 12, 1938, Füsün Onur has lived in her family home in Istanbul's Kuzguncuk neighborhood from her childhood to the present day. She has lived in the same house with her sister İlhan Onur throughout her life. From interviews with Füsün Onur, it is understood that her parents, Hayri and Nedime Onur, were knowledgeable, modern, and culturally and intellectually inclined individuals who valued art during their time. In one of the interviews made by Defne Ayas, Füsün Onur expressed this with the following words: "Our father was very supportive of us. He was one of the staunchest advocates of modernization. Our mother was stricter and more disciplined. But she supported our involvement with art just as much" (Ayas, 2012, p. 11).

Füsün Onur has stated that her interest in art dates to her childhood years, even beginning to sculpt figures around the ages of 10 or 11 (Onur, Bir Cevap, 1990). During her elementary school years, she created ballerina figures from plasticine, and later worked with plaster and clay materials (Büyükcünal, 1990, pp. 17, 18). Onur completed her high school education at Üsküdar Amerikan Kız Lisesi, where she was supported and encouraged by her art teacher, Miss Blatter, due to her inclination towards art (Pelvanoğlu, 2012, pp. 267, 276). Füsün Onur mentioned that her art teacher was a well-known painter in her country and, at that time, created illustrations for children's books. In one interview, Onur shared a memory of Miss Blatter sending her a note suggesting help with a book she was preparing, making Onur feel proud to be recognized as an artist (Büyükcünal, 1990, pp. 17, 18). Additionally, during the years Onur was in high school, the district of Üsküdar and the neighborhood of Kuzguncuk where she lived were referred to as "little America" by the residents due to its cosmopolitan characteristics (Evren, 2023, p. 121). The connections

of the artist's upbringing with the world and America might have laid the groundwork for her later education in the United States.

Between 1957 and 1960, Füsün Onur completed her sculpture education at the State Academy of the Fine Arts (now Mimar Sinan University). She decided to study sculpture, as she explained in an interview: "In those years, the art of sculpture was not well recognized. One day, I read about a sculptress named Ayperi Balkan in a newspaper published by the Academy Theatre. It dawned on me that women could do it too. I made my decision and enrolled in that department" (Büyükcünal, 1990, p. 17). At that time, she shared a studio with a few other newcomers to the sculpture department and those who had started the Academy after middle school. Initially, she was a student of Ali Hadi Bara, and later of Zühtü Müridođlu (Büyükcünal, 1990, pp. 17, 18). In the 1950s, Ali Hadi Bara turned towards non-figurative art, which led to innovative alternatives to classical teaching methods in his workshop (Brehm, 2007, p. 21). Füsün Onur recounted an incident with Hadi Bara: "In recent years, the teacher asked me if a new technique I tried on the torso was done consciously. When I replied 'no,' he cautioned, 'Be careful, you'll be moving to abstraction soon.'" (Pelvanođlu, 2012, p. 258). From what Onur recounts about these years, it is understood that her time in the Academy was a happy period. During these years, Füsün Onur worked at an American company during the summer months. She continued to work there part-time during the school term as well (Büyükcünal, 1990).

After graduating from the academy, Füsün Onur won a Fulbright scholarship in 1962 and went to America for her master's studies. During her oral exam for the Fulbright scholarship, Onur expressed her desire to study in America with the phrase, "I want to find myself" (Onur, Bir Cevap, 1990, p. 70). She initially began her education at American University in Washington D.C. During her time there, she developed an interest in philosophy and read extensively (Onur, Bir Cevap, 1990). However, not completing her master's program, she began working at a graphic workshop. When her employer at Di Giovanni & Associates learned that Onur was a sculptor, he asked her to make a bust of his son. When she took the molds for the bust to a foundry, she met Alfredo Halegue, a sculptor and professor at the Maryland Institute, who advised her to apply there (Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 2012; Pelvanođlu, 2012, p. 168). Onur described the process from applying to starting the master's program: "When I applied to the Maryland Institute

College of Art, I found out their scholarships were fully allocated; it was purely an art school. I had prepared projects in my mind and was very confident in myself. I didn't go back, instead, I invested all the money I had in their summer courses and started working. It turned out to be a good decision; at the end of the course, the jury convened and admitted me to a one-year master's program” (Büyükcinal, 1990, p. 17). After being admitted to the master's program in 1963, she found herself in her own studio, with the opportunity to work without limitations on time and materials. During this period, she wrote a master’s thesis titled “The Art Object as a Possible Self in a Possible World, Publicly Put Forth on Its Own Account as a Possibility of Being,” but it was never published (Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 2012, p. 21). In 1967, upon graduating from the master's program, Onur was offered to stay in America, but she chose to return to Turkey to engage in beneficial work, reflecting her desire to contribute to her home country (Pelvanoğlu, 2012, p. 268). She left behind approximately twenty black and white drawings and many sculptures when she returned from the USA (United States of America) (Antmen, Enchanting Realms, 2022). Furthermore, there was a possibility that she might accept an offer to go to a university in Germany as an artist-in-residence; however, she declined this opportunity as well (Morgan, 1970).

#### Art and Culture Environment In Turkey During The 1970s and 1980s

The 1960s and 1970s were a period when art movements diversified in Turkey, and the influence of international art movements increased. Styles such as abstract art, pop art, minimalism, and conceptual art began to gain more prominence in the art scene. Many contemporary artists of Füsün Onur also produced works that went beyond traditional materials and techniques.

The 1960s was a decade marked by significant transformations worldwide, alongside the events of May 1968. To fully understand the art scene in Turkey, it is essential to consider what was happening internationally during this time. The decade was characterized by technological advancements and a rivalry between the USA and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) regarding who would first reach space. The proliferation of television had a growing influence on individuals, leading to the emergence of pop culture icons. Additionally, the USA's intervention in Vietnam sparked student movements and a quest

for freedom in many countries in May 1968 (Gürdaş, 2015, pp. 11, 12). This period also saw debates against authoritarian values, racial discrimination, traditional gender roles, and conventional moral standards. In such a context, the art world experienced changes that were in line with the times, leading to the emergence of new movements such as Pop Art, New Realism, and Minimalism. Artworks began to focus more on movement and thought, with *conceptual* works becoming widespread. The use of the body in art also became prominent (Gürdaş, 2015).

After 1960 in Turkey, the spread of socialist thought was facilitated by translations of left-leaning publications from around the world, as well as various magazines and books. This influx of socialist literature significantly influenced the art scene of the period. The effects of the global events of 1968 were also felt in Turkey, with the emergence of student and labor movements. During this period, many artists participated actively in these movements, both through their art productions and direct involvement. A group of artists, including Abidin Dino, Nedim Günsür, and Nuri İyem, organized an exhibition and donated the proceeds to the *DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions in Turkey) Solidarity Fund* to support workers (Berk, 2007, pp. 55, 57).

One of the notable art events of the 1960s was a campaign organized by Milliyet Newspaper under the title “erecting sculptures in provinces without sculptures.” The campaign was successful, and a competition was held, resulting in selected artists being commissioned to create sculptures for specific provinces. The provinces and their assigned artists were as follows: Nusret Suman – Bingöl, Hüseyin Gezer – Tunceli, Şadi Çalık – Bitlis, Hüseyin Anka Özkan – Van, İsmail Gökçe – Giresun, Gürdal Duyar – Muş, İsmail Gökçe, Zühtü Müritoğlu – Muş (Gezer, 1984, p. 21). Additionally, in April 1961, an exhibition by the art group *Yeni Dal* at the Istanbul Municipality City Gallery was shut down. The artworks displayed at the exhibition were confiscated, and the artists were arrested under Article 142 of the Turkish Penal Code. These events occurred during the period when the National Unity Committee was temporarily in charge of the country's governance (Antmen, *Türk Sanatında Yeni Arayışlar (1960 -1980)*, 2005, pp. 30, 31). This period exemplifies the restrictive nature of the art environment, highlighting the impact of political instability on the arts and cultural sphere. While the campaign to “erect sculptures in cities without sculptures” aligned with the nationalistic themes prominent in the early

years of the Republic was supported, shortly thereafter, members of the *Yeni Dal* art group were arrested for the paintings exhibited at their show (Terzi, 2008, p. 62).

Another significant aspect of the Turkish art scene in the 1960s was participation in international biennials and group exhibitions abroad. Although participation in international biennials began in the 1950s, it became more organized and frequent in the 1960s. Some of these biennials include the Venice Biennale, São Paulo Biennale, and Tehran Biennale (Antmen, 2005, pp. 52, 56). Additionally, in 1963 in Brussels, and in 1964 in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and Rome, group exhibitions titled *Contemporary Turkish Art* were held. These international exhibitions provided an opportunity to promote contemporary Turkish art, and the reactions and critiques received at these exhibitions added new perspectives to the Turkish art environment (Antmen, *Türk Sanatında Yeni Arayışlar (1960 -1980)*, 2005, pp. 56, 57).

During this period, it is observed that the productions of sculptors predominantly consisted of abstract works. Even though in the 1960s in Turkey, sculpture and monumental sculpture were considered the same, key sculptors of the era such as Hadi Bara, Zühtü Müridoğlu, Kuzgun Acar, İlhan Koman, Şadi Çalık, Ali Teoman Germaner, and Zerrin Bölükbaşı produced works that were abstract and abstractionist. The reason for this was the emergence of questions regarding traditional figurative sculpture and its techniques, leading to an examination of sculpture's inherent elements such as mass-space, volume, surface, proportion, and balance, and the impact of these inquiries (Antmen, *Türk Sanatında Yeni Arayışlar (1960 -1980)*, 2005).

The period between the March 12, 1971 military memorandum and the September 12, 1980 coup in Turkey profoundly influenced the country's cultural dynamics and the art scene of the era. Amid political and social turmoil, young artists who sought a cultural identity diverging from the idealistic legacy of the Republic faced challenges in expressing their creativity on a divided social ground. Although the 1960s saw an increase in art publications, international participation, and artistic activities, revitalizing the art world, discussions remained largely confined to the dichotomies of local-global and figurative-abstract. Particularly in sculpture, aside from monuments and Atatürk busts, alternative approaches were scarcely accepted. Artists like Zühtü Müridoğlu, Kuzgun Acar, İlhan Koman, and Hadi Bara developed innovative sculptural concepts during the 1960s, yet



these approaches failed to gain sufficient recognition even into the 1970s. Due to the lack of a supportive art environment, many pioneering artists of the period, including Füsün Onur, were often left to forge their own paths and were accused of imitation (Şaşmaz, 2024).

Besides these, 1970s in Turkey saw an increase in the number of institutions providing art education, which enriched artists with different methods and approaches and enabled them to gain various expressive possibilities. In the academies, the inclusion of the younger generation in teaching staff created a ground open to new approaches. During this period, alongside state galleries, the venues for exhibitions expanded to include private galleries, foreign cultural centers, banks, and educational institutions' exhibition spaces.

The establishment of the first independent Ministry of Culture in Turkey in 1971 is considered a significant development in the country's art scene. Although this was a long-awaited development within the art community, the institution was attached to the Prime Ministry as a secretariat in 1972. It regained its independence in 1974 but was attached to the Ministry of National Education in 1977. It became independent again, and in 1981, it was merged with the Ministry of Tourism. Although there have been changes in subsequent years, today it continues to operate as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Teftiş Kurulunun Kısa Bir Tarihçesi, 2024).

To understand how the art scene was influenced by political turmoil and the public's reaction to art in this restrictive environment, it's important to know about one of the most telling incidents: the *Güzel (Beautiful) Istanbul* sculpture event. In 1973, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Republic, a plan was set to create 50 sculptures for Istanbul. This event was significant for enhancing the visibility of Turkish sculpture beyond just monumental sculptures. The initiative aimed for the creation of sculptures that would both reflect the artist's style and represent contemporary Turkish art, thereby allowing sculpture to exist in the city beyond just busts and monuments. Following a selection process, artists were chosen, including Kuzgun Acar, Zühtü Müritoğlu, Füsün Onur, Ferit Özşen, Nusret Suman, Seyhun Topuz, and Gürdal Duyar (Antmen, 2005, p. 21). Among these sculptures, *Güzel Istanbul* by Gürdal Duyar depicted a nude woman integrated with her pedestal. After its installation in the location designated by the municipality, it faced severe criticism and acts of vandalism from both the public and politicians of the time. The Interior Minister at

the time made a statement that “the sacred Turkish mother could not be exhibited so nakedly,” reinforcing the backlash against the sculpture (Gezer, 1984, p. 33). Subsequently, *Güzel İstanbul* was moved to a less visible location in Yıldız Park and left deformed (Gezer, 1984, p. 34). In response to this incident, the Sculptors Association opened an exhibition titled *Çıplak* (Nude) in June 1974 at the Taksim Art Gallery (Antmen, 2005, p. 123). Füsun Onur's piece *Nude*, made with mirrors and deformed toy dolls, was her response to this event.

In Turkey, unfortunately, works that feature nudity still elicit harsh reactions, protests, and even attacks today. For instance, during the 15th Istanbul Biennial in 2017, a group of people attacked the exhibition and the venue at the Abdülmecid Efendi Mansion, which displayed works from the Ömer Koç Collection, including sculptures of naked humans and animals. Thankfully, this attack was quickly quelled without any damage to the artworks, thanks to the intervention of security personnel and the counter-reaction of art enthusiasts present at the site (Gazete Duvar, 2017). The words of Sina Akşin describe the ideal environment for such art pieces, one where they are not targeted by authorities or subject to attacks from the public: “It is evident that technology, science, philosophy, culture, and art are interconnected. For these to be productive, freedom of thought; respect and value for science, culture, art, those engaged in these fields, and their institutions are essential. These individuals and institutions should not be subjected to the pressures of social, political, or religious dogmas” (Akşin, 2007, p. 224)

### Artistic Life and Works

Füsun Onur's relationship with art dates to her childhood. She started by modeling with playdough and clay, which her father brought home for her. Later, during her undergraduate education, she learned traditional sculpture, working with busts, torsos, portraits, and models. However, she soon instinctively shifted her path and began to explore abstractions in sculpture (Brehm, 2007, p. 20). It can be considered that her inclination towards abstraction was naturally influenced by her professor at the Academy, Ali Hadi Bara. After receiving his education in Paris, Ali Hadi Bara returned to Turkey in 1930 and began teaching sculpture in 1932. Following his years in Paris, he turned towards non-figurative art and abstract forms (Ali Hadi Bara, 2024).

During her time in the USA, Füsün Onur created massive sculptures from white plaster in various geometric shapes. In the 1960s, she also incorporated metal parts into her works (Ayas, 2012, p. 8). These sculptures featured curvaceous forms made from plaster that appeared to undulate, enhanced with added metal elements. Her works from this period initially evoke the creations of her mentor at the Academy, Ali Hadi Bara. Particularly, they seem reminiscent of Ali Hadi Bara's works from 1952, *Full-Empty* and *Continuous Form in Void*, in terms of their approach to form (Brehm, 2007, p. 26). However, upon closer examination, it is evident that Füsün Onur's pieces differ from those of Ali Hadi Bara. While Bara's sculptures are characterized by sharp edges and more definitive geometric shapes, Onur's sculptures are more flowing, wavy, and rounded, and despite their massiveness, they do not convey a sense of material weight (Brehm, 2007, p. 27).

During her time in America, Füsün Onur spent most of her time working in the studio. It is known that she neither devoted time to social activities nor followed art events and exhibitions (Brehm, 2007, p. 25). She constantly reflected, experimented, and realized her art by using the opportunities given to her, her inner world, and her education to explore and discover what she wanted to achieve in her art.

Füsün Onur created a series of works titled *Dividing Space on a White Piece of Paper* (As can be seen in Figure 1). She divided the white paper with black geometric lines, played with forms, and created new appearances, crafting fissures on the surface with lines that seem to start and end indiscernibly. The black forms on the smooth whiteness of the paper evoke themes of inside-outside and what lies behind the apparent, reminiscent of the architectural-like sculptures we would see in her later years. Additionally, these works can be read as precursors to her future three-dimensional pieces, which are segmented and spread across space. Moreover, Onur's work recalls Kazimir Malevich's black square on a white background from 1913, which is considered significant in the development of Minimalist art ideas in art history (Antmen, 2014, p. 181). Onur, it seems, has fragmented this black square on the white background to create new forms.

The works of Füsün Onur have been evaluated considering the trends of different periods in the artist's career, and potential influences such as societal contexts and art movements that may have been reflected in the artworks. The selection of works was made to ensure they encompass all periods of Onur's artistic career. Additionally, due to the of descriptive

texts or commentaries on many pieces, works with transparent visual sources were chosen to provide enough information.

### 1970 – 1980 Period

During this phase, Onur delved into the limits of sculpture, experimenting with geometric shapes in diverse manners. As an emerging artist, this was also the period when she started creating her works, a time before her art had achieved widespread acclaim. She has started using various materials such as Plexiglas, ready-made objects, and canvas.

After completing her master's degree in 1967 and returning to Turkey, Füsün Onur opened her first exhibition in 1970 at Taksim Art Gallery. The works displayed in this exhibition showed similarities in material and form to her work in the USA. Similarities observed in her first exhibition to her American period include the use of white color, rounded geometric objects, plaster, and elements reflecting the weight and lightness of objects (Brehm, 2007, p. 31). Her large sculptures made from materials like plaster, wood, and sponge almost resemble architectural elements. These abstract and voluminous sculptures, with their openings and voids, create doorways and passages that arouse curiosity about the inside and outside. Additionally, from the mid-1970s onwards, Onur's works began to include figures, symbols, and expressions that convey short stories to the viewer. Another interesting work in this exhibition is a white cube, with contents slightly spilling out. The lid of the white cube is slightly opened due to the pressure of the contents inside, with black stains appearing to flow out. The use of black and white, the black stains on the cube's white surface, and the black line dividing the cube remind us of her earlier works, *Dividing Space on White Piece of Paper* (As can be seen in Figure 1). Such that this cube and a few other forms she later produced can be seen as three-dimensional representations of her works on paper. Moreover, it wouldn't be incorrect to suggest that these early works carry traces of Minimalist art, as Onur was studying for her master's degree in the USA during the 1960s when Minimalist art was developing. In her interviews, she mentioned that she did not visit many exhibitions because what she imagined about an exhibition based on what she heard often did not match what she found there; therefore, she spent most of her time working in the studio (Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 2012). Even if it is assumed that she did not see any exhibitions and was minimally affected by outside events, the

contemporary education she received at the university in the USA, the inclinations of her instructors and other artists, possibly the topics discussed, and the art articles and criticisms published in magazines and newspapers, among other sources, might have informed Onur about the trends of the period. Many forms produced by Onur in the 1970s, either untitled or labeled as compositions, support this possibility.

### 1980 – 1990 Period

During the 1980s, notable innovations are evident in Füsün Onur's personal art history. She intervened in the exhibition space and created wall objects that blur the lines between painting and sculpture (Brehm, 2007, p. 84). This decade brought new developments to the ways in which she arranged her exhibitions to enhance the audience's experience of her artworks. Her installations from these years are particularly notable for playing with the boundaries between painting and sculpture, allowing viewers to enter the space, become part of the artwork for a moment, and engage in discovery. Her expansive works crafted from colorful, mixed materials are also striking during this period. Alongside these, she continued to explore different forms of expression, with an increased use of unconventional and everyday materials as well as a more pronounced use of craftsmanship. These efforts reflect Onur's ongoing commitment to pushing artistic boundaries and challenging traditional perceptions of art mediums. Additionally, her use of canvas and frames in her works has increased compared to previous years.

In Onur's works during the 1980s, there is a noticeable strengthening of conceptual expression, which actually began to emerge in the late 1970s. The onset of the 1980s in Turkey was marked by the September 12 Coup, which affected all areas of life, including the art and culture scene. This event may have influenced Onur's work by enhancing the abstract aspects and the visibility of her inner world (Evren, 2023, p. 76). During these years, when her conceptual side was strengthened, Füsün Onur's works frequently featured abstract worlds and meanings associated with reality, as well as the theme of time.

The artwork titled *Third Dimension in Painting – Come In* (As can be seen in Figure 2) was featured in the *New Trends* exhibition at the 3rd Istanbul Art Festival in 1981. Füsün Onur created this piece using blue wool yarns stretched over a hoop. Upon entering the artwork, visitors found themselves under a created sky of shorter threads adorned with

colorful, shiny beads, and a cushion placed on the floor facilitated comfortable observation of this sky. This piece bears a notable resemblance to Onur's work *Dream*, produced in the same year, which might be considered almost a two-dimensional, wall-bound precursor or preliminary study to *Third Dimension in Painting – Come In*. Remarkably, these were the first instances where Onur primarily used yarn as the main material in her artworks.

In Füsün Onur's works from 1971, the concept of inside-outside and the interior of objects as elements of curiosity are observed. However, it was in this particular piece that the audience could for the first time experience the world inside one of Onur's artworks. Thread and beads, commonly used by women in daily life, are frequently seen in Onur's works. According to Margrit Brehm, the photographs of the exhibition "allows a comparison with the other exhibits and illustrates how far Onur has distanced herself from the art practice of the time. The fact that the jury awarded the work second prize also shows that its innovatory force was recognized" (Brehm, 2007, p. 84).

During her solo exhibition at the Taksim Art Gallery in 1982, Füsün Onur created an artwork titled *Counterpoint with Flower* (As can be seen in Figure 3) which encompassed the entire space. She transformed the architectural essence of the exhibition space by covering the ceilings and walls with blue plastic, altering the permanent nature of the architecture as the walls lost their usual appearance. Instead, she used fragile, thin plastic material that could easily deteriorate. Within this light, undulating, blue environment, she placed a sparse distribution of plant life. This setup evoked the sensation of being underwater. To complement this aquatic-like landscape, Füsün Onur also wrote a text, enhancing the thematic connection and depth of the artwork.

This text is not to explain the work presented in a place where anything is considered as art, and anything new or foreign to the eyes of the viewers is considered an imitation of Western art. I though [*sic*] it my duty to explain how an artist thinks, how she works. I hope it will be helpful. This is a task I wanted to accomplish.

Visual art seems to explain itself at first glance. What is needed is to enter into its inner structure, which is successive and expanded in space, as the function of time. I want the viewer to go, through the work, leaving his expectations and memories behind. I want him to look successively. If it is viewed the other way, beginning and end will become one. It will be a dead-end. The flow of the work will end. It is important to discover the inner

connections of the work and look at what is there, without prejudice, without the habits the viewer has already gained. Following the succession, the emptiness will be filled and changed with each viewer.

Why I am using this title is because in this work, time is most important. Those forms are being seen together for the first time. You see them all together. Then it follows, one after the other. Time is in the work. Whoever looks at it one after the other, enters the inside. So I wanted time to be spread out around the space of this work and I wanted people to see all these elements without having what they expected. Just watch the elements. Whoever watches this work, should only follow the inner stream of the work and not their habits, so that the flowing can continue. Emptiness must change with extension, so that emptiness is changed with each visitor. These are the things I wanted because it is a visual counterpoint. It's without sound. Because it is visual, it is quiet. But isn't music silent before it starts and after it has ended? (Brehm, 2007, pp. 101, 102)

Indeed, encountering something completely new and unprecedented in today's world is increasingly challenging, and interpreting it without the influence of pre-existing mental images is nearly impossible. However, Füsün Onur has succeeded in creating a space where viewers can accomplish this, by constructing an environment that transcends time and space. She has extended her work beyond the conventional limits of architecture. In *Counterpoint with Flower* each viewer can initiate and conclude their own experience within the installation, moving or remaining still, thereby activating their personal sense of time.

### 1990 – 2000 Period

Towards the end of the 1980s, Füsün Onur produced works that were political and socially engaged. This approach, particularly strong in works with a social stance, continued into the first half of the 1990s. During these years, her use of chairs as a prominent material in her artworks continued to probe social issues. It is noted that her participation in international exhibitions increased during this period. Additionally, themes such as Istanbul and Onur's changing Istanbul, the relationship between time and space, and the state of being present here and now, were evident during these years.

From 1995 onwards, Onur began to create her silent compositions with a complete sense of rhythm. With the *Cadence* (As can be seen in Figure 6) exhibition, she filled a space entirely with a musical installation for the first time. These musical installations have become some of the most prominent and identifiable works in Onur's art, representing her unique artistic expression.

In the 1993 exhibition *Contemporary Women Artists*, the artwork *Untitled* (As can be seen in Figure 4) consists of a chained chair and a piece of paper bearing the artist's name. The chair itself has a cold, serious look, resembling institutional rather than home furniture. Its back and arms are bound with a thick, metal chain, positioned in such a way that it appears to prevent someone from sitting down or leaving, yet the chain notably does not restrict the movement of the name tag labeled "Füsün Onur".

When Füsün Onur returned from the USA to Istanbul with the goal of contributing beneficially to her country and began exhibiting her works, she was initially neither taken seriously nor understood. She describes this experience by saying, "At first, they didn't take it seriously. They thought the diploma was given for the sake of acquaintance and looked down on it. They said this diploma doesn't count here" (Büyükcünal, 1990, p. 18). Faced with such reactions, she continuously pursued her art life in her studio, at home, and around Istanbul. Additionally, in 1986, in an article titled *Modern Heykelin Türkiye'de Korunması* (Preservation of Modern Sculpture in Turkey), referring to the Academy of Fine Arts, Onur stated: "We should academically criticize works that are devoid of any worldview and just repeat hollow things. Unfortunately, our main art center is in this condition today. It would be good if it were in this condition, it has no quality whatsoever" (Onur, *Modern Heykelin Türkiye'de Korunması*, 1986, p. 96). With these statements in mind, we can discern the space or lack thereof that the art community was willing to provide her. She might have felt she was not in the position she deserved, or uncomfortable with being mechanically categorized according to predefined standards when they did recognize her.

Furthermore, as mentioned in her work *This Place* produced in the same year, a political interpretation is also possible. In this context, Onur positions herself as any individual or representative of a society constrained by government oppression and limited freedoms and rights. Additionally, the chained chair with her name could symbolize the absence of a proper place for women in society (Brehm, 2007, pp. 45, 46).



The first of two artworks in book format by Füsün Onur, titled *I Don't Know French* (As can be seen Figure 5), was featured in a mixed exhibition in Paris. Positioned on a desk under a lamp, this book with a red cover intricately incorporates lace and fabric pieces, beads, and threads, adhered to create various motifs and lines of text. The layout of the pages, reminiscent of lines and stanzas, suggests that this book could be a poetry collection. Playful aspect of Füsün Onur's works is evident in this piece. The book transcends linguistic boundaries, conjuring images of children who, unable to write, fill pages with their unique lines and scribbles. In this work, Onur shares elements of her distinctive artistic language, incorporating fabric and handcraft, with her audience. Furthermore, Onur narrates the story of women's traditions using materials like lace, fabric, buttons, and sequins once kept by her mother or other women, employing traditionally feminine-associated crafts such as handiwork and sewing.

*Cadence* is an installation by Füsün Onur held at the Maçka Art Gallery (As can be seen in Figure 6). The gallery space does not offer a neutral venue due to its architecture, which deviates from the contemporary white cube concept. One of the gallery's most characteristic elements is its straw-colored ceramic tiles, which continuously cover all interior surfaces in a square pattern. Artists at Maçka Art Gallery have often established a relationship between their works and the space itself. The space has sometimes been covered, altered, used merely as a backdrop, or even incorporated as part of the artwork. In this installation, Onur has utilized almost exclusively the space and materials found within the gallery. She brought in only external materials such as tulle embellished with beads and sequins, and strings of beads. Other materials used include the gallery's ready-available picture hanging rods, stools, and a trash bin. The installation begins with a rod hung on the wall; the hooks on this initial rod, meant for hanging pictures, have been inverted rendering them non-functional. There are ten rods in the first section, four hung on the wall and six leaning on stools arranged in two symmetrical rows on the floor. These ten rods are covered with tulle, detaching them from their original function (Köksal, 1995). On the rods which are leaning on stools, she has further added new forms of existence to the objects without physically altering them. At the end of this sequence of stools and rods, a beaded tulle is hung in a gallery niche. Beside the niche, in a corner, a trash can is also incorporated into the installation by covering it with tulle. In the back of the gallery space,

there are more picture rods hung at various heights and three additional tulles hung in gallery niches, which are illuminated with red light. Onur concludes her installation with a string of beads hanging from the ceiling.

The term cadence in music refers to a sequence of chords played together that concludes a musical piece (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This installation, beginning with a rod and ending with a string of beads, with stools and rods creating a repetitive rhythmic pattern, is not artist's first rhythmic work. Her earlier installation in 1976, *Untitled Variation* in front of the Archaeology Museum, can be seen as an initial example of such spatial arrangements. However, in *Cadence*, she has explicitly connected the title and the entire arrangement to distinctly visualize and spatially distribute a specific segment of a musical piece through three-dimensional objects. Aykut Köksal has described this rhythmic arrangement in the exhibition catalogue as follows: "The work features twenty-one and a half hooks and twenty-one hooks in the same rhythmic arrangement:  $(1/6/4)(1/4/4)(1)$ " (Köksal, 1995). Altering the function of objects is a recurring element in Onur's works. Working with ready-made and found objects, she often reinterprets these items for her installations, either giving them new meanings or leaving them as enigmatic masses.

Füsün Onur made the following statement regarding this work: "Based on the rhythm of the Maçka Art Gallery, I spent four months creating this piece. My hope is for the viewer to hear the pure pattern formed through the repetition and usage of content" (Milliyet Sanat, 1995). In her own words, the artist has emphasized that her work is no longer just to be viewed, but also to be heard, adding an auditory dimension to it. She has prepared a conclusion by arranging objects belonging to the gallery itself, corresponding to the gallery's own rhythm or music, its square-tiled surfaces, and niches. In her arrangement, she avoided major emphases or abrupt changes. The calmness at the end of the musical piece can be discerned from the way the objects are placed.

After *Cadence*, Onur continued to create numerous works related to music. Using materials from the gallery, the serene, uncomplicated, and repetitive arrangements that were prominent in *Cadence* have also become fundamental elements in her subsequent musical works (Brehm, 2007, p. 104).

### 2000 – 2010 Period

In 1995, the installation *Cadence* marked a shift toward musical arrangements becoming prominent in her work. Like a music composer, she meticulously calculated how to display each sound according to the venue, and the works connected to the musical meaning in their titles continued into the 2000s. Among these, the installation *Opus II* (As can be seen in Figure 7), which popularized Onur's silent music, is also regarded as one of the masterpieces of her mature period in musical installations. During the same years, she also wrote a music book titled *Nocturne*.

In 2001, Füsün Onur prepared her installation *Opus II – Fantasia* (As can be seen in Figure 7) for the exhibition *From Far Away So. Four Women Artists From Turkey* curated by Margrit Brehm in Baden-Baden (Brehm, 2007, p. 114). Later, various arrangements of the piece were featured in two mixed exhibitions: in 2011 at Arter in Istanbul, and in 2018 at the Neues Museum in Nuremberg. Most recently, it was exhibited from June 3, 2021, to February 20, 2022, under the curation of Emre Baykal at Arter (Füsün Onur: *Opus II - Fantasia*, n.d.).

In the 600 square meter space allotted to her, Füsün Onur designed the layout using a plan of the area and arranged it with white knitting needles, gold-gilded yarn balls, blue-and-white porcelain figurines, and white wooden pedestals. Among the used materials, notably, the exhibition space included 19 white pedestals of various sizes and 250 pairs of size 9 knitting needles. Additionally, Onur personally brought the gold-gilded yarn balls and small blue-and-white porcelain figures from Istanbul to Baden-Baden. On the floor, the knitting needles formed various patterns reminiscent of musical scores in some places. Gold-colored yarn balls with threads unfurling from them surrounded by blue-and-white porcelain male and female figures and the distinctively larger white pedestals were also visible.

Brehm (2007) observed that Onur's meticulous arrangement of knitting needles and yarn resembled a musical score. Onur's confident placement of the first row across the vast floor (200 square meters) suggested a clear mental image, not random experimentation. Despite the tiny size of the objects within the even larger space (600 square meters), they created a captivating, rhythmic order that entranced viewers.

*Opus II-Fantasia* (As can be seen in Figure 7), which followed *Prelude* in 2001, can be regarded as the main work if we consider *Prelude* as the introductory piece. Opus means a creative work, especially a musical composition or a set of works by a composer, often numbered to indicate the order of the composer's output. Although Onur describes this creation as resembling a monologue for a single instrument, the appearance of the exhibition might remind the initial viewer of a philharmonic orchestra at first glance (Brehm, 2007, p. 118). Every element has been meticulously planned. The forms that give rhythm to the silent music have all been worked out on the layout of the structure and placed accordingly. Moreover, the forms, part of Onur's early work that involved segmenting sculptures, dividing spaces, and spreading material through time, combine with intangible sounds. This blending of the visual and the musical creates a new, sensory experience. This skill emerges from years of experimenting with time and space, allowing her to engage the viewer in an experience that cannot be simply glanced at and passed by in two minutes, but must be perceived with multiple senses.

#### 2010 – 2020 Period

Beginning with the installation named *She Has Been Here* in 2008, Füsün Onur's works during this period carry meanings related to memories, the passage of time, and remembrance. Particularly in 2009, with her work named *Elegy for Tekir*, there is a visible desire to commemorate those no longer present. During this time, her artworks that involve embroidery on fabric, as well as those utilizing light and shadow effects with curtains and carpets, are significant. Alongside these, she continued her site-specific and musical installations. Onur's most recent works while this study was being written were *Once Upon a Time*, exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2022 and *A Room with A Muse* (As can be seen in Figure 9), prepared at the Retrospective exhibition at Cologne in 2023 are crucial for enhancing the artist's international recognition.

*Once Upon a Time* (as can be seen in Figure 8) is a work produced by Füsün Onur for the 59th Venice Biennale's Turkish Pavilion. This piece is significant not only for its impact in reinforcing the artist's visibility and importance on the international stage but also for reflecting the lifelong dedication of the 85-year-old artist to her unique path in the art world. The installation tells a story through 21 different scenes featuring cats and mice, displayed

on platforms suspended at various heights. The materials used include metal wire, table tennis balls, fabric pieces, and paper. The two main figures of the installation are a cat and a mouse. The venue for Onur's work, located in the Arsenale, is an old naval warehouse (Örer, Curatorial Statement, 2022). The exhibition space, with its walls showing exposed bricks where plaster has fallen off and its dark atmosphere, features each of the 21 platforms illuminated by yellow-toned spotlights. This lighting evenly accentuates each scene, simultaneously creating a soft, fairy-tale-like ambiance upon entering the exhibition area.

The story begins with children who have become aware of the climate crisis and are frightened by it. Our heroes, a mouse named Cingöz and Onur's cat Zorba, meet and learn about the impending climate disasters from the children. The situation is so critical that these two species, naturally not very compatible, decide to work together. In this partnership, there is no leader; all are equals. Later, Cingöz learns that a ship is heading to Venice, a city he heard about from his artist friends. In scene 9, the journey is depicted with fabric and embroidery creating a seascape. Cingöz stays with friends living in the Turkish Pavilion at the Arsenale. On his first night, he has a nightmare about *COVID-19*, which terrifies him. Eventually, Cingöz falls in love with a girl in Venice. In scene 16, the girl is shown at a party, dancing in a dust-pink tulle dress, with her head made of yellow metal wires and a small ping pong ball. Later, the cat Zorba joins them, witnessing the happiness of Cingöz and the girl in the pink dress. In scene 18, the figures become abstract, their faces disappear, and only their outlines and colors are visible, like blurred photographs in motion. First fragments of the tulle dress and a pink shoe are seen, later complemented by flowers and grass they walk through, and a piece of pink tulle. Scene 20 is set on a platform hung in front of a window in the exhibition space, showing the couple sitting and looking at the view. And in the final scene, scene 21, a specially decorated, empty gondola is displayed. Onur concludes the story with the phrase, "The gondola is still waiting..." She leaves her story both ambiguous and open to all possibilities, thus providing a space for viewers to make their interpretations and incorporate their personal meanings into the work. This approach of creating an open environment for the viewer-artwork relationship enhances or expands the meaning of the artwork. Onur's perspective on art transcends static objects, never valuing permanence as a material, thus successfully achieving

permanence in our collective memory by encouraging viewers to engage in intellectual interaction.

This 21-platform narrative closely resembles a three-dimensional fairy tale book in many aspects. The choice of characters like a cat and a mouse, which possess human-like traits only in fairy tales or fantastical stories, and the illustrative appearance reminiscent of drawing and painting with tiny wires and colorful fabrics, suggest it could almost be considered a children's picture story. Additionally, the artist's manipulation of wires to shape figures and create miniature furniture and spaces might also serve as a metaphor pointing to her sculptural background. This resonates with Füsün Onur's consistently playful and naive expression. Moreover, the fact that the entire work cannot be viewed at a single glance, and each platform needs to be examined individually like the pages of a book, supports this analogy. As in her previous works, Onur incorporates elements from her personal life, the prominent event of the virus outbreak, and her motivations related to the Venice Biennale and the city of Venice itself into her narrative. Traces of significant events can often be detected in many of her works. Additionally, when Onur specifically creates a piece for a particular topic or exhibition, she includes elements relevant to that theme or location in her work. Consequently, *Once Upon a Time* (As can be seen in Figure 8) can be read as a universal fairy tale that is accessible to all, capable of awakening meaning even in the youngest viewers.

For her retrospective exhibition at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, Füsün Onur created a space titled *A Room with A Muse*, filled with blue light as can be seen in Figure 9. Onur stated on this work:

One last blue.

For a room I have never seen, that will never enter.

I was given to me so that I could fill it, and now I give it to you as it is, so that you can fill it.

I just wanted a blue light inside.

And tiny little fairy will rest its wings at the end of violin string, as if it has come to listen to someone practicing the violin in the next room.

If you have time, pull up a chair from the pile in the corner and take seat:

where Here, why Here, how Here,

which Here, what Here, whose Here,  
how many here, what color Here,  
while you're Here, if you're Here,  
Here when, Here now,  
if there is a Here, if there is no Here,  
before Here, after Here,  
up to Here.

Here, in the house where I was born, we were three siblings. Senih was fond of the sea and boats. I love painting. Whereas İlhan used to play violin once upon a time. Our mother was all happy about it, our father even more so. But one day, something happened. I was very young; İlhan told me this story years later.

A great misunderstanding, an irreparable estrangement. İlhan had been consumed by Dvorak's Humoresque, playing the piece day and night, to the point that she had stopped eatin, an endless practice all day long. One day, late night, my father told her, stop now for a little while, take break, or this will end in melancholy. And she had stopped. Chin rest, tailpiece, bridge, key, pegs, snail, she put them all in a box, never to be opened again.

I feel like I can hear the music now. She is playing in the next room, and as she is playing, I feel my heart blossom:

Do blue Re navy Mi pink Fa orange Sol red La green Si yellow. (Emre Baykal, 2023, p. 40)

In her work, Füsün Onur emphasizes a personal and emotional narrative through her detailed discussion of past memories, family members, and their hobbies and passions. The artist had recently lost her sister İlhan Onur, with whom she had lived her entire life and who had always been her supporter. Thus, when considering the blue room and the tiny fairy resting, along with the sound of a violin coming from the next room, it becomes clear that everything here relates to her lost sister. As in her previous work *Elegy for Tekir*, Onur transfers the memory and emotion of a loved one she has lost into her art. The piece presents the relationship with her sister, her memory, and their connection to music to the audience. The dominant blue light in the artwork, a color always prevalent in Onur's works, recalls the shade of *International Klein Blue*. This color, transforming material into something more mystical like Yves Klein's *IKB* (International Klein Blue) does, aligns with

the meanings embedded in Onur's creation (O'Doherty, 2021, p. 111). Indeed, the installation's primary element is the blue light, and altering this color would not yield the same mystical and serene atmosphere. The stools in the room allow visitors to move around and sit as they wish, reflecting Onur's characteristic approach to participatory interactive art. By involving the viewers, it enables them to interpret the work through their own experiences, memories, and emotions. This tribute to İlhan Onur not only represents the artist's family ties and personal losses but also offers a universal example of how art can address memory, loss, and love.

## **DISCUSSION**

Füsun Onur is recognized as a pioneer among the artists in contemporary Turkish art worldwide. She was one of the few progressive artists who opened *traditional modern art* for discussion in Istanbul's art circles in the early 1970s. Another such artist was Altan Gürman, who, unfortunately, passed away in 1976 (Kaya, 2008, p. 38). In the writing of art history, it is necessary to evaluate, explain, and organize an artist's works by associating them with certain movements. However, contemporary progressive artists like Füsun Onur cannot be fully evaluated within the confines of a single movement. Onur has repeatedly stated in interviews that she did not create her works to be part of any particular art movement. However, it would be incorrect to say that the era in which an artist lives, the cities they inhabit, their education, and many other factors do not indirectly influence their art. Therefore, it is necessary to mention the art movements that some of her works evoke. Füsun Onur's art, often regarded within the context of conceptual art, shows academic similarities to certain trends and movements of various periods upon a historical evaluation. These similarities, although not consistently present in all her works, sometimes relate to the use of materials, the mode of expression, and the meanings carried by the artworks. A few of her works carry traces of Minimalist art, not necessarily in meaning but due to their materials and forms. Minimalism, or Minimalist art, emerged in the 1960s in the USA as a movement simplifying form and content in art. It was referred to by various names that hinted at the movement, such as "ABC Art", "Cold Art", and "Serial Art". It is characterized by simple geometric forms, the relationship between the artwork and its environment, and an arrangement established through repetition. Minimalist artists used a



variety of mediums, including industrial materials like plexiglass, steel, fiberglass, brick, aluminum, and particle board (Antmen, 20. *Yüzyıl Batı Sanatında Akımlar*, 2014, pp. 181, 182). Especially Füsun Onur's early works, can be likened to Minimalist art. Her series titled *Dividing Space on a White Piece Paper* (1965-66) (As can be seen in Figure 1) reflects this through its pursuit of form purity, the effort to reveal a unique language, the use of contrasting colors, and the shapes created by lines on paper, all of which resemble the expression style of Minimalist art. Traces of Minimalist art can also be seen in her works from the early 1970s. Compositions from the years 1970-71-72 among her early works are significant indicators of this influence. Works like *Composition* (1971) and *Untitled* (1970) can be considered examples of this movement. Additionally, her work *Untitled* (2014) in the exhibition *Through the Looking Glass*, which features architectural elements made of mirror resembling but more angular than an arch, can also be included in these examples due to both material and form. Alongside these, her musical installation titled *Cadence* (As can be seen in Figure 6) also shows Minimalist influences with its repetitive arrangement and the use of cubes and rods. While Füsun Onur's early works appeared close to minimalism, she quickly moved towards more free forms, found objects, and handcrafting, emphasizing meaning, experience, and her unique approach. Therefore, it is more accurate to associate Onur with Post-minimalism and Conceptual art. Post-minimalism, recognized as an approach shared by many artists in the USA during the 1970s, adopts a freer style as opposed to the rigid formalism of minimalism (Antmen, 20. *Yüzyıl Batı Sanatında Akımlar*, 2014, p. 185).

Füsun Onur's art distinctly carves out its place in contemporary Turkish art by simultaneously paralleling various artistic movements such as post-minimalism and conceptual art, while also diverging from them in definite ways. Some of her works simplify form and content. However, she enriches this formal simplicity with elements from personal passions like music, or by engaging with collective memory and storytelling based on her own experiences. Her artworks have demonstrated how art, during periods of intense political and societal transformation in Turkey, can still pose questions, make observations, or simply exist authentically without resorting to slogans. This ability to create a space for the mundane amid intense contexts also reflects in her work. Particularly, a few of her pieces directly engage with societal or political changes. Onur's sensitivity

towards society, the environment, and the world also prominently features in her art. In this respect, Onur has become an important figure through her continuous personal art practices and her responsive art language that dialogues with social transformations and collective memory.

## **CONCLUSION**

After completing her sculpture education at the Academy, Füsun Onur applied for a Fulbright scholarship to explore her own artistic language in the United States. During her years there, she spent long hours in the studio and gained some work experience. She also frequently engaged in philosophical readings during this period. As an artist who was not a fervent follower of the external world, exhibitions, or art events, Onur spent her master's program experimenting with forms and questioning the boundaries of sculpture. Upon declining an offer to stay in the USA after her education, Onur returned to Turkey and in 1970, she started her regular solo exhibitions at the Istanbul Taksim Art Gallery with her first personal exhibition. These early years not only mark a period where Onur's art did not find much recognition and was superficially criticized but also document how the Turkish art scene viewed and responded to new ideas at the time.

Füsun Onur has secured her place as one of the impactful artists on the contemporary art scene in Turkey. Her art practice, which includes the use of diverse materials, spatial arrangements, and conceptually rich works, offers a depth of meaning. Onur has utilized her art not only as a form of expression but also as a medium of communication. She has achieved this by sometimes drawing on her personal memories to connect with collective memory, at other times by making the viewer a component of the artwork, and occasionally by addressing societal and environmental issues. This approach has enabled her works to function as parts of an ongoing dialogue.

Although Füsun Onur's art initially showed parallels with movements like minimalism and post-minimalism, she transcended these influences by developing a distinctive artistic language and narrative within conceptual art. Her innovative approaches to material selection and form have endowed her works with a unique identity. The materials she uses and the placement of everyday household items in the gallery blur the lines between everyday objects and art objects, demonstrating to the viewer how art can be intertwined

with the world they inhabit. By leaving her works open to the viewer's interpretation, Onur has emphasized that art is an ever-changing and multifaceted dialogue. From the beginning of her career, Onur's art practice has focused on the selection of materials and their spatial arrangements, containing a rhythm and order that require attention, similar to a musical composition that requires its listeners to dedicate time to appreciate its structure. In her works, the interaction between the objects used and the space is striking. Onur, who has expanded the traditional boundaries of sculpture, is recognized for her compositions that necessitate allocation of time by the viewers, much like the engagement required in listening to a musical piece.

In conclusion, if we need to compile the most prominent works among the various materials and approaches in Füsün Onur's oeuvre, the following pieces should be mentioned:

Among a series of works where she experimented with forms of sculpture in the early 1970s, *Untitled-Shapeless Form* exhibited in Paris in 1971 was her first piece that allowed the audience to physically interact with it. In her work *Nude* prepared for a protest exhibition in 1972, the toy doll she used was the first ready-made object encountered in Onur's works. The *Untitled Variation* in the garden of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum in 1976 was her first installation arranged with a rhythmic pattern. In 1981, her work *Third Dimension in Painting – Come In* (As can be seen in Figure 2) was the first time the audience could enter the piece, explore it by sitting or lying on the floor mattress inside. Subsequently, in her 1982 work *Counterpoint with Flower* (As can be seen in Figure 3), she covered the entire space for the first time, creating a new reality. This piece, which also prominently features musical references and the application of spreading the work over time, demonstrates Onur's innovative approach and represents one of the peaks of her art. Although her 1984 piece *Bird* might seem like an inconspicuous wall object or canvas work among her other works, it stands out because it contains significant clues about the development and transformation of Onur's style. In this work, Onur appears to share with the audience the process of expressing a bird with only a found feather. The 1985 work *Dream of Old Furniture* is significant as her first installation emphasizing the transformative effect of the modernist gallery space and incorporating objects from the home into her work. The 1987 piece *Morning Gymnastics* is among her important works with its use of fabric and conceptual images related to daily domestic life. Onur's works

never contain a single concept; as seen in this piece, multiple associations and inferences can be made. Her solo exhibition *Sign of Sign* in 1987 can be considered one of her masterpieces. In fact, during the 1980s, she conveyed the life of an increasingly growing, immigrating metropolis like Istanbul with all its contradictions and deteriorating aspects as if through theater curtains. In her 1987 work *Plaid 1-2-3-4*, Onur demonstrated how she deconstructed or transcended the traditional understanding of painting with a playful style. The chairs wrapped in tulle in *Any Chair* produced in 1991 and the chairs with chains and the name FÜSUN ONUR produced in 1993 in her work *Untitled* (As can be seen in Figure 4) carry strong conceptual meanings. These works represent not only political meanings such as society and state oppression but also the fact that women are not adequately represented in social life or are not where they deserve to be, symbolized by the names and tulle images. In 1995, she prepared a book without letters or text, titled *I Don't Know French* (As can be seen in Figure 5), by pasting and sewing materials into a red-covered notebook. Her 1995 work *Cadence* (As can be seen in Figure 6) was Onur's first large-scale musical installation. With this installation, Onur began her series of silent musical installations arranged in harmony with titles carrying musical meanings. Her installations *Opus I* exhibited in 1999 at Hagia Irene and *Opus II – Fantasia* in 2001 (As can be seen in Figure 7) can be considered the pinnacle of her musical installations. After these masterpieces, she even prepared a music book titled *Nocturne* in the same year. Her work *Elegy For Tekir* dated between 2009-2012 highlights themes like loss, memory, and emotional bonds. It draws attention with a different display method resembling a play of curtains and light. Her 2016 work *As You Know* is significant due to its relationship with exhibition space and direct communication with the audience. *Once Upon a Time* (As can be seen in Figure 8), produced for the Venice Biennale in 2022, is an important piece both for Onur and for representing Contemporary Turkish Art. The story she tells on thin white pedestals arranged in a square shape resembles scenes from a theater play. Additionally, it includes a topic affecting people worldwide, such as the Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020, demonstrating once again Onur's sensitivity to her surroundings. Her latest work to date, *A Room with A Muse* in 2023 (As can be seen in Figure 9), was made to honor and commemorate the loss of her sister İlhan Onur, as understood from the text she wrote about the piece. In this work, music is present and absent simultaneously, positioned differently

than ever before. Onur used light to cover the entire space as the main material for the first time. One of the conclusions that can be drawn from this work is that Onur has a passion for creating art without using the primary element of an art form. She has composed musical scores by arranging certain materials in a specific order without sound, engaged in literature without using letters and writing, and brought together different branches of art with works resembling scenes from a theater play. Starting her artistic life with a sculpture education, Füsün Onur's versatility developed over time. Each of her works individually shows how they create alternatives to, question, and bridge the various art disciplines.

Füsün Onur has presented the concepts she wanted to convey or the forms and arrangements she wished to realize using a wide range of materials and techniques. She has continued this production process up to the present day. By integrating art into life, and believing in the social, political, and humanistic characteristics of art, she has succeeded in establishing a dialogue with the audience through her works. Onur has questioned the boundaries between art and life through the artistic arrangements she created with objects taken from daily life. Despite being 86 years old, she continues to produce art.

Preprint

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

- Örer, B. (2022). Curatorial Statement. In *Füsun Onur Once upon a time...* (pp. 4-8). Milan: Mousse Publishing.
- (1995, 02-03). *Füsun Onur "Kadans"*. İstanbul: Maçka Sanat Galerisi.
- Akşin, S. (2007). *Kısa Türkiye Tarihi*. İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
- Ali Hadi Bara. (2024, 04 14). Retrieved from Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Culture and Tourism: <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/EN-117591/ali-hadi-bara.html>
- Antmen, A. (2005). Türk Sanatında Yeni Arayışlar (1960 -1980). *Doktora Tezi*, 30,31,52,56,57,78,21,123. İstanbul, Türkiye: T.C. Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sanat Tarihi Ana Bilim Dalı Batı Sanatı Ve Çağdaş Sanat Programı.
- Antmen, A. (2014). *20. Yüzyıl Batı Sanatında Akımlar*. İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık.
- Antmen, A. (2022). Enchanting Realms. In *Füsun Onur Once upon a time...* (pp. 26-43). Milan, Italy: Mousse Publishing.
- Ayas, D. (2012). Füsun. In *FÜSUN ONUR* (pp. 10-14). Köln: dOCUMENTA (13).
- Büyükcinal, F. (1990). Füsun Onur İle Söyleşi. *Sanat Çevresi 136*, 17-18.
- Berk, G. (2007). 1970-1980 Yılları Arasında Türkiye'de Kültürel ve Sanatsal Ortam. *Doktora tezi*, 27,55,57. Ankara, Türkiye: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sanat Tarihi Ana Bilim Dalı.
- Brehm, M. (2007). *For Careful Eyes*. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayınları.
- Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). *Dictionary*. Retrieved 03 30, 2023, from Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cadence>
- Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, H. U. (2012). FÜSUN ONUR, CAROLYN CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV, AND HANS ULRICH OBRIST, IN CONVERSATION. In *FÜSUN ONUR* (pp. 20-25). Köln: dOCUMENTA (13).
- Emre Baykal, B. E. (2023). Füsun Onur: An Introduction. In *Füsun Onur* (pp. 30-40). Köln: Museum Ludwig.
- Evren, S. (2023). Vignettes on Füsun Onur in Light of Three Time Periods. In *FÜSUN ONUR* (pp. 118-132). Köln: Museum Ludwig.
- Füsun Onur: Opus II - Fantasia*. (n.d.). Retrieved 05 2023, from Arter: <https://www.arter.org.tr/sergi/fusun-onur-opus-ii-fantasia/333>
- Gürdaş, B. (2015). 1960'LARDA TÜRKİYE'DE SİYASİ VE TOPLUMSAL DEĞİŞİMLER BAĞLAMINDA GÖRSEL KÜLTÜR. *Doktora Tezi*, 11,12,28,29. Ankara, Türkiye: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Sanat Tarihi Ana Bilim Dalı.
- Gazete Duvar. (2017, 10 22). *Ömer Koç koleksiyonuna saldırı!* Retrieved 03 20, 2023, from gazete duvar: [https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2017/10/22/bienal-sergisine-saldiri#google\\_vignette](https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2017/10/22/bienal-sergisine-saldiri#google_vignette)
- Gezer, H. (1984). *CUMHURİYET DÖNEMİ TÜRK HEYKELİ*. Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları.
- IKSV. (2022). *Füsun Onur Once Upon A Time...* Retrieved 2024, from IKS: [https://pavilionofturkey22.iksv.org/en/#chronology\\_page](https://pavilionofturkey22.iksv.org/en/#chronology_page)
- Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts. (2022). *Füsun Onur Once upon a time...* Milan: Mousse Publishing.
- Köksal, A. (1995, 03 6). *FÜSUN ONUR "KADANS"*. İstanbul: Maçka Sanat Galerisi.

- Kaya, Ç. (2008). Füsün Onur . In E. Y. İpek Duben, *seksenlerde Türkiye'de çağdaş sanat: yeni açılımlar* (pp. 37-51). İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.
- Milliyet Sanat. (1995, 03 1). Füsün Onur'un Sergisi Maçka Sanat'ta. *Milliyet Sanat*.
- Morgan, H. (1970). Sculpture. *Alma Mater*(4), 10.
- O'Doherty, B. (2021). *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (A. Antmen, Trans.) İstanbul: Sel Yayıncılık.
- Onur, F. (1986). Modern Heykelin Türkiye'de Korunması. *Hürriyet Gösteri*, 96.
- Onur, F. (1990). Bir Cevap. *Sanat Çevresi* 139, 70-71.
- Pelvanoğlu, B. (2012). Füsün Onur Kronolojisi. In *Füsün Onur* (pp. 258-266). Köln: DOCUMENTA (13).
- Şaşmaz, N. (2024, 02 19). *Şeyler ve Varlık Arasında*. Retrieved from manifold: <https://manifold.press/seylar-ve-varlik-arasinda>
- Teftiş Kurulunun Kısa Bir Tarihçesi*. (2024, 03 28). Retrieved from Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı: <https://teftis.ktb.gov.tr/yazdir?340F55042AC83F71F4425A3EB6A91AC7>
- Terzi, S. (2008). 12 Eylül 1980 Sonrası Sanat-Siyaset İlişkisi ve Plastik Sanatlara Etkisi. *Yüksek Lisans Tezi*, 62. İzmir: T.C. Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü Güzel Sanatlar Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı Resim Öğretmenliği Programı.

## FIGURES



**Figure 1** *Dividing Space on a White Piece of Paper* (1965-66) Dimensions: 30 x 22.5 cm each. Materials: Ink, paper. Retrieved from: (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2022)

NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.



**Figure 2** *Third Dimension in Painting – Come In (1981)* Dimensions: 275 x 300 x 210 cm. Materials: Wood, painted thread, rubber, fabric, spangle. Retrieved from: (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2022)



**Figure 3** *Counterpoint with Flower (1982)* Dimensions: 215 x 650 x 850 cm. Retrieved from: (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2022)



NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.



**Figure 4** *Untitled* (1993)

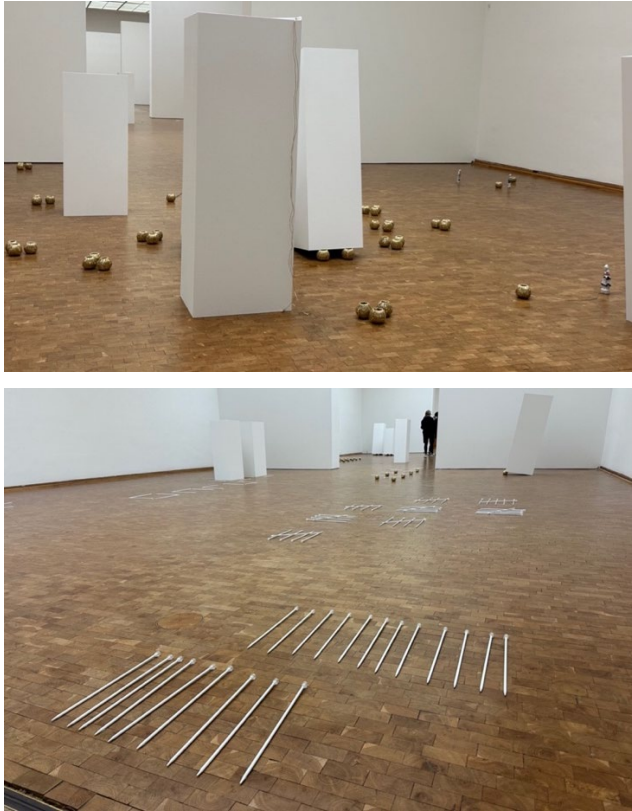


**Figure 5** *I Don't Know French* (1995) From: (IKSV, 2022)



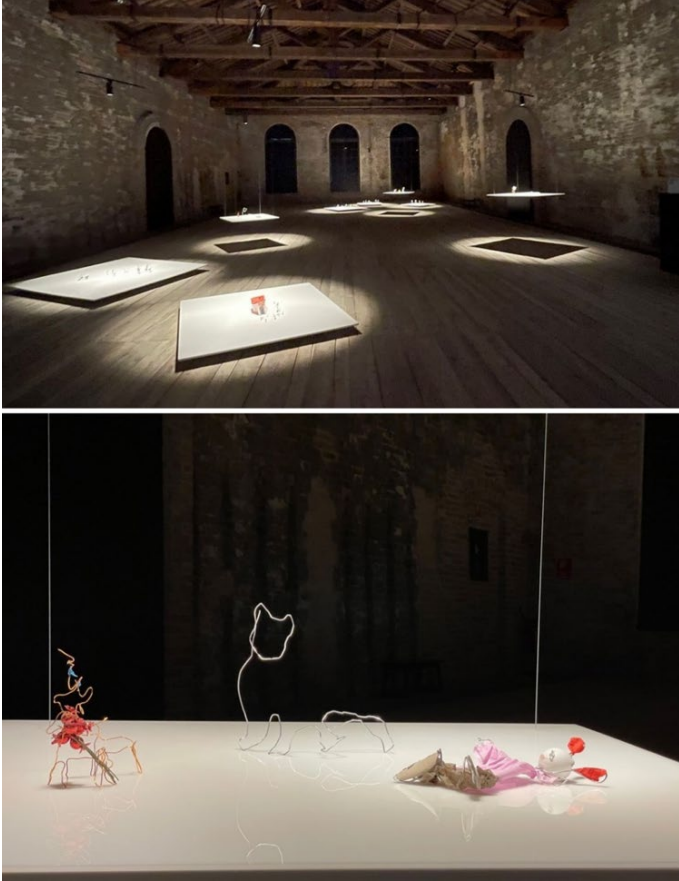
**Figure 6** *Cadence* (1995) From: (Füsün Onur "Kadans", 1995)

NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.

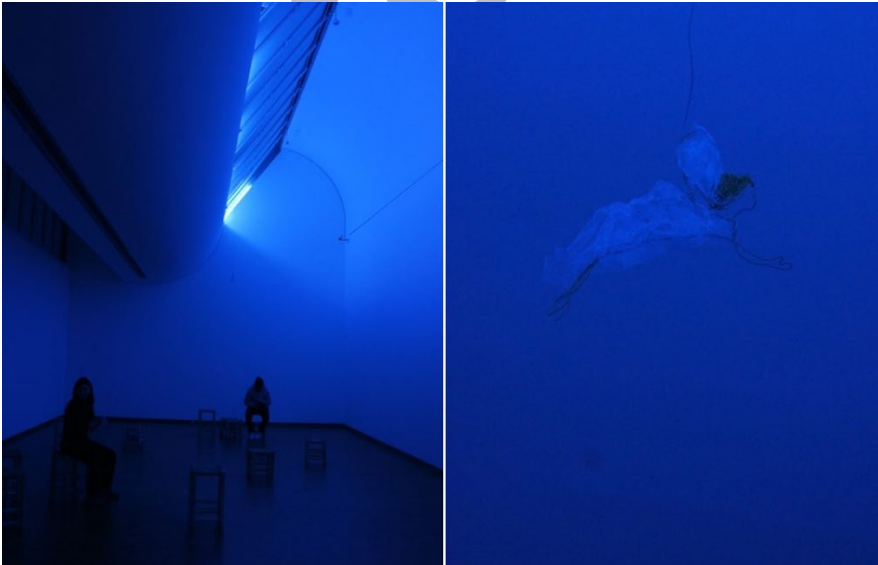


**Figure 7** *Opus II-Fantasia* (2001) Materials: Knitting needles, balls of gold braid, porcelain figurines, plinths. Retrieved from: (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, 2022)

NOTE: This preprint reports new research that has not been certified by peer review and should not be used as established information without consulting multiple experts in the field.



**Figure 8** *Once Upon a Time* (2022) Materials: Wire, tulle, fabric, paper, ping pong ball.



**Figure 9** *A Room with A Muse* (2023) Materials: Blue light, stool, tulle, wire.