

**CIRCULATING ART:**  
**THE POLITICS OF TRANSNATIONAL EXHIBITION EXCHANGES IN THE**  
**MUSEUMS OF CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL**

by

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MUSEUMS OF CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL**

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## ABSTRACT

CIRCULATING ART:  
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**Keywords:** Transnationalism, neoliberalism, culture and governmentality, museums, ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions, culture and arts scene in Istanbul.

This thesis focuses on the circulation of transnational art exhibitions through the metropolis of Istanbul. My main emphasis is on the proliferation of new museum spaces which attract ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions from abroad, and their emergent role as cultural flagships in an era of neoliberal urban transformation. Based on interviews with prominent museum directors and curators in the Istanbul art scene, I discuss how sponsorship of such transnational exhibitions has become increasingly important in the competition among large corporations, lending them visibility in the cultural economy of the city. By focusing on specific blockbuster exhibitions, I try to highlight how they are facilitated through coalitions between governmental and non-governmental interests which span across national boundaries. Throughout, I try to link my observations on the shifting parameters of the art scene in Istanbul, to the broader dynamics of neoliberal urban transformations in Turkey and elsewhere around the world. My overall argument is that ongoing changes in Istanbul’s art markets cannot be understood through conventional binary oppositions such as global/local, or national/international. Rather, they are driven by networks of institutional interests, economies, agents and practices which need to be conceptualised as ‘transnational’.

## ÖZET

### SANAT YOLCULUKLARI: ÇAĞDAŞ İSTANBUL MÜZELERİNDE Kİ ULUSLARARASI SERGİ DEĞİŞİM POLİTİKALARI

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uluslararası, neoliberalizm, kültür ve yönetsellik, müzeler, 'blockbuster' sergiler, İstanbul'daki sanat ve kültür sahnesi.

Bu tezin konusu uluslararası sanat sergilerinin İstanbul metropolündeki dolaşımıdır. Başka ülkelerde 'Blockbuster' sergiler için cazip olan yeni müze alanlarının çoğalması ve bu müzelerin neoliberal kentsel dönüşüm alanında beliren kültürel öncülük rolleri çalışmadaki temel husustur. İstanbul'daki sanat sahnesinde öne çıkan müzelerin direktörleri ve küratörlerle yapılan görüşmeler çerçevesinde, bu tür uluslararası sergilerin yapılmasında mali destek sağlamakla ilgili konuların büyük şirketler arasındaki rekabet nedeniyle ve şehrin kültürel ekonomisinin görünürlülüğü bakımından her geçen gün artan bir öneme sahip olduğunu tartışıyorum. Belirli 'Blockbuster' sergiler üzerinde odaklanarak, bu sergilerin resmi ve sivil toplum örgütlerinin çıkarlarının birlikteliğiyle ulusal sınırlar içerisinde nasıl olanaklı hale geldiğini anlamaya çalıştım. Çalışma boyunca, gözlemlerimi İstanbul'daki sanat sahnesinin değişen parametreleriyle, daha geniş anlamda, Türkiye ve dünyanın başka herhangi bir yerindeki neoliberal kentsel dönüşüm dinamikleriyle ilişkilendirmeyi denedim. İstanbul'un sanat pazarında süregiden değişimlerin küresel/yerel, ulusal/uluslararası gibi basmakalıp çift kutuplu zıtlıklarla anlaşılamayacağı çalışmamın temel argümanıdır. Daha ziyade, bu değişimler 'uluslararası' olarak nitelenmesi gereken kurumsal çıkarların oluşturduğu ağlar, ekonomiler, etkenler ve uygulamalar tarafından şekillenmektedir.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

EU:	European Union
Platform Garanti:	Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center
İKSV:	Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts
Istanbul Modern:	Istanbul Museum of Modern Art
UK:	United Kingdom
USA:	United States of America
SSM:	Sakip Sabancı Museum

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Observations of the Istanbul art world in early 2012 reveal an incredible plethora of collections from transnational platforms being exhibited in the new museums<sup>1</sup> of the city. In January and February 2012 almost every new museum in Istanbul was showing an exhibition of similar grandeur, bringing yet another temporary blockbuster show to the eyes of the Turkish public and the city's visitors.

In the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art (from now on referred to as Istanbul Modern) an exhibition from the Dutch Boijmans Van Beuningen museum collection was on display<sup>2</sup>, while part of its own collection was being exhibited simultaneously in the Netherlands. Further up the Bosphorus, the Sakip Sabancı Museum was attracting its

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<sup>1</sup> Istanbul has been experiencing the construction of museums and the establishment of art festivals sponsored by corporate actors beginning in the 1980s. It is the museums from this era, that I will consequently refer to as 'new museums' in Istanbul. Retrieved on 10.06.2012 at: [http://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/la-la-la-human-steps\\_61.html](http://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/la-la-la-human-steps_61.html)

<sup>2</sup> As the website of the Istanbul Modern described the exhibition entitled “La la la Human Steps”: “Founded in Rotterdam in 1849, Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum has an international collection comprising over 140 thousand works of classical, modern, and contemporary art. This selection from the collection of the museum brings together major works by 28 artists from around the world. La La La Human Steps exhibition focuses on human relations, humanity and our struggle to cope with life as human beings. It is possible to translate these themes at historical, personal, and public levels. Hence the exhibition follows three main strands that take “human” as starting point, and complement one another.”

visitors with a Rembrandt exhibition<sup>3</sup>, displaying some of the masterpieces of Dutch Golden Age art. At the Tophane-i Amire exhibition space, in the new museal district and close to the Istanbul Modern, a Dali exhibition, widely advertised on billboards across the city, was trying to attract large numbers of visitors. The Antrepo space in the same area displayed a digital Van Gogh exhibition for the appreciation of the Istanbul museum visitors, sponsored by Abdi Ibrahim pharmaceuticals. Just few weeks later, the Pera Museum opened its doors to an exhibition of engravings and paintings by Francisco de Goya.<sup>4</sup>

The circulation of such transnational exhibitions has become a central aspect of cosmopolitan life in many parts of the world. In this thesis, I will be exploring their implications in the context of current shifts in the Istanbul art scene. My main focus will be on how such exhibitions come to Istanbul and the networks of actors, corporations, and governmental stakeholders which facilitate this process. The broader literature which informs this thesis can be discussed under the three following headings: i. The Metropolis of Istanbul as a new Art Destination, ii. The Expediency of Culture and Corporate Investment, iii. Between Global Imaginaries and Local Contextualisation.

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<sup>3</sup> As the website of the Sakıp Sabancı Museum described the exhibition entitled “Rembrandt and his Contemporaries”: “As Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum (SSM) celebrates its 10th anniversary, it opens the exhibition “Where Darkness Meets Light... Rembrandt and His Contemporaries - The Golden Age of Dutch Art” to the public. [...]

Besides Rembrandt, the exhibition presents a total number of 110 works; 73 paintings, 19 drawings and 18 objects by 59 artists including major representatives of Dutch art. Additionally, the exhibition presents the painting entitled “The Love Letter” by Johannes Vermeer, who remained an obscure figure for centuries with his works being attributed to other artists for a long time. Although only 35 works are attributed to Vermeer today, he is universally acknowledged as a major artist of his time. Works by great artists including Frans Hals, Jan Steen and Jacob van Ruisdael are on display in the exhibition, which presents the splendour of the Golden Age of Dutch Art, considered to be one of the most exciting periods in art history.” Retrieved on 05.06.2012 at <http://muze.sabanciuniv.edu/page/where-darkness-meets-light>.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief description and history of these museums, see Appendix 1.

## **1.1. The Metropolis of Istanbul as a new Art Destination**

The marketing of culture has become the unique competitive edge of the metropolis today (Zukin 1995). All of the exhibits on display in Istanbul during the spring of 2012 were designed to attract both local art enthusiasts and tourists to prestigious new art spaces on the shores of the Bosphorus. Tourists are being lured into the new museums of Istanbul as an alternative, but particularly as an attractive addition to the 'open-air museum' of the historical peninsula of Istanbul. The online edition of Lonely Planet for example describes the Istanbul Modern as follows: “Opened with great fanfare in 2005, this huge converted shipping terminal has a stunning location right on the shores of the Bosphorus at Tophane and is easily accessed by tram from Sultanahmet.”<sup>5</sup>

Throughout this thesis, one of my main concerns will be how Istanbul is mediating its position on the international stage through new exhibition spaces and transnational exhibitions. In particular, I will be considering the significance of blockbuster exhibitions and their multiple functions such as “urban marketing and tourism, global branding and visual consumption” (Rectanus 2007:383). In this context, I will emphasise the role of new 'flagship museums' which have become instrumental in attracting creative industries and a 'creative class' (Florida 2003, 2005) to the metropolis, as well as changing the meaning of what constitutes culture.

## **1.2. The Expediency of Culture and Corporate Involvement**

One of my essential concerns in this thesis is how transnational forms of exhibition acquisition are challenging the conception of public national property of culture in its previous idealisation. Thus I will be proceeding along the lines of Yudice's work (2003)

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<sup>5</sup> Lonely Planet (2010) *Istanbul City Guide* (online edition). Retrieved on 02.03.2012 at:  
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/turkey/istanbul/sights/gallery/istanbulmodern#ixzz1oQ47IzOF>

who emphasises the changing role of culture in an increasingly globalised world as one in which governments, transnational organisations, and corporations have come to see culture as a valuable resource to be invested in, contested, and used for various socio-political and economic ends. He describes the use of culture today as expedient. 'Culture' has in turn become an instrument and a solution, as Yudice (2003) has argued, for problems that were previously the providence of economy and politics.

Throughout my analysis one point of particular interest will be how the increasing corporate investment in culture and the arts has a profound impact on the art world. Further, I will attempt to describe how culture has assumed central importance through governmental as well as non-governmental actors and the coalitions of interest which underpin major art projects. I hope to elucidate an understanding of how such coalitions are reshaping the long-standing meanings of what constitutes a museum.

### **1.3. Between Global Imaginaries and Local Contextualisation**

In her work on the 'Cultural Logic of Transnationalism', Aihwa Ong discusses how conventional oppositions, such as global/local or national/international no longer capture emergent modalities of governmentality in the world today. In the late capitalist society, she argues, it is more fruitful to focus on constellations of institutions, actors, practices and economies which operate across national boundaries. Her approach helps to prioritise mobility and circulation rather than adopting a model that articulates 'the global' as defined by political economy and 'the local' as the realm of culture. It emphasises “the horizontal and relational nature of the contemporary economic, social, and cultural processes that stream across space [as well as expressing] their embeddedness in differently configured regimes of power” (Ong 1999:4).

In the following pages, I aim to follow her strategy, avoiding the term globalisation and emphasising transnational networks. Furthermore, rather than assume that nationalist narratives and state hegemony have now been displaced by global trends in late

capitalism, I will try to show how national narratives are imbricated in the cosmopolitan imaginary of present-day Istanbul.

#### **1.4. Methodological Considerations**

Since my main concern in this thesis is the transnational circulation of art exhibitions, I have chosen to focus on three of the most prestigious private museums in the art scene of İstanbul: the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art (Istanbul Modern), and the Pera Museum. These are institutions with the capacity to host 'blockbuster exhibitions' in their premises, and have the financial resources to handle the insurance costs involved for artworks assembled in such mega events.<sup>6</sup>

In choosing my interview partners, I took care to include at least one representative from each of the three museums above, in addition to speaking with other prominent figures in the art world of Istanbul. Such individuals are significant actors in building coalitions between large corporations, NGOs and the museums, and are key figures in the transnational networks of art circulation. I have also interviewed representatives from The Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSVA), a very important institutional actor in building the transnational networks that facilitate a series of art, music and film festivals throughout the year.<sup>7</sup>

The people I interviewed include some of the most prominent names in the art scene of Istanbul. Many are public figures, frequently quoted in the arts section of daily newspapers as well as more specialised art journals. They can be described as the 'elites' of the art scene in Istanbul. Carrying out interviews with such people presents a series of special problems. At the more practical level, gaining access to them involves a time-consuming process of referrals and setting up appointments which can be cancelled at the last moment. They are often reluctant to allocate valuable time to young

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1, p 76 for brief information on the corporate affiliations of these museums.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 2, p. 80, for brief resumes of the people I interviewed.

researchers, and are liable to cut the interview short unless probed skilfully. At the more substantive level, there are a series of issues which stem from the unequal power relationship embedded in the interview situation itself.

As Conti and O'Neill (2007:3) point out for instance, 'elite interviewing' which involves powerful people in their respective fields of expertise, often creates dangers of being talked down to by one's interviewee. The issue of unequal power relations which shape the kind of knowledge produced in the interview situation is not confined to 'elite interviewing', however. There are complex modalities of power which are embedded in any interview situation (Smith 2005). Since such power dynamics not only shape the interview situation itself, but also influence knowledge production, these dynamics must be reflected upon during the entire interviewing process (Conti & O'Neill 2007). What seems important to recognise is that the methodological difficulties of interviewing elites ("studying up") are different from those encountered in non-elite situations ("studying down"). In elite interviewing, it is important to adopt a flexible research strategy, which leaves room for revisions of the list of interviewees as well as in the interview questions. Interview questions need to be particularly flexible in order to manage the contest over authority in the research process.

My own experience in interviewing elites in the Istanbul culture and arts sector taught me that I needed to discourage my interview partners from reproducing well-rehearsed institutional narratives. So it became necessary to shift interview questions from their 'comfort zone' to questions that were not commonly asked. This was not always an easy task since interview partners would regularly revert to topics in which they felt more at ease. Further, keeping the choice of my interview partners flexible and becoming increasingly acquainted with the Istanbul culture and arts scene, allowed me to find gatekeepers for different key players in the art world. Recommendations from other elites allow the researcher to gain credibility and legitimacy as a researcher. The building of credibility in the research process with elite interviewing is a central task because elites are extremely busy individuals with little time on their hands. Asking questions that seem insignificant or that could easily have been researched beforehand have the potential of cutting interviews short (Zuckermann 1972). I took great care in

the crucial task of preparing my questions by carrying out background research on the elites I would be interviewing and the institutions they work for. This background research was possible through the internet, as many of these individuals are public figures or have personal websites. I further needed to be prepared to answer questions concerning my research project (Zuckermann 1972), as well as having an introduction to outline the scope and objectives of my research at my fingertips.

All but one of my interviews in the Istanbul art scene were conducted in English. Elite people in this very international scene speak excellent English since they have frequently been educated abroad or at the elite universities in Istanbul and Ankara. My meeting with Özlem Ece is the one exception which was conducted in Turkish. I have translated those passages of the interview that I used as excerpts in the thesis, into English.

In order to gain a general overview over the topic of inquiry, I have used online archives to trace different transnational exhibitions in Istanbul, particularly in the years 2010-2012. These exhibitions are well documented through the museum websites, the exhibition catalogues, and the media, all of which have given me insights into the transnational aspirations of these shows.

### **1.5. Organisation of this Thesis**

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will be focussing on the growing role of corporate actors in the domain of visual arts and the coalitions entered into by governmental and non-governmental actors in sponsoring major art projects. In this context I will be discussing the ways in which such coalitions change the role that culture plays through the 'assemblage' of governments, transnational organisations, and corporations that have come to see culture as a valuable resource.

In the second chapter, I will delve into a discussion on major actors in the arts sector who broker between the corporate competition in Istanbul and the transnational art



world. I will focus on the role played by curators and directors, cultural brokers, as well as the audiences of the Istanbul culture and arts scene.

Finally in my third chapter, I will describe emergent publics and the marketing of culture in the metropolis of Istanbul. By focusing on a number of blockbuster exhibitions, I will highlight the significance of transnational circulation in the art scene in cultivating 'new publics', as well as enhancing the competitive edge of the metropolis. I will discuss how national narratives are imbricated in the cosmopolitan imaginary to point out how conventional binary oppositions such as global/local, or national/international need to be displaced by a focus on transnational circulation. Finally, I broaden my discussion by reflecting on the coincidental growth of what is considered a 'new middle class' in Istanbul with the opening of this new wave of museums. I consider how 'urban renewal' projects in Istanbul are influenced by the consumption patterns and imagination of this 'new middle class', while simultaneously excluding large strata of the population of the city.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **QUESTIONS OF GOVERNMENTALITY IN THE REALM OF CULTURE**

The art field in Istanbul today is a contested terrain where different institutions and actors compete in formulating the content and meaning of what constitutes culture. Until recently, this field was dominated by the state. Over the past two decades, multiple actors have entered the art scene not only as producers and consumers of culture, but also as makers of what might be termed cultural policy. In this context “museums operate increasingly both 'inside' global networks of material exchange and 'outside' the historically circumscribed boundaries of social and cultural production”, as Rectanus has pointed out (2007:382). This phenomenon is particularly visible in Istanbul where corporate actors have embraced 'art' as a symbol of global stature. Thus, major corporations have begun to invest in cultural activities ranging from the support of film and music festivals to the opening of their own private museums. In this process, engagement with art and culture has become a very significant dimension of corporate public relations. Increasingly, large corporations are competing with governmental actors in the art field as well as engaging in 'partnerships' in ways that are significantly shifting the parameters of the art world. In this chapter, I will be specifically focussing on the growing role of corporate actors in the domain of visual arts.

## 2.1. Narratives of Change from the Field

I want to begin by considering how my interviewees described and interpreted ongoing changes in Istanbul. They all seem to be in agreement that the last 30 years had ushered dramatic changes into the art world of Istanbul. But their narratives of how and why these changes have occurred differed substantially. In most accounts the establishment of İKSV (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts) in 1973 was singled out as the starting point of the changes. To quote directly from an interview:

*Visual arts and contemporary arts were quite neglected. [...] And for that the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and the Arts is quite important because it started with a mission, [...] that [was] to organise a festival.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

As Çelenk Bafra, a curator of the Istanbul Modern (and previous director of the Istanbul Biennial) described to me, the visual arts had traditionally been under-represented in the national museums in Turkey before the advent of private museums in the city. Cultural policy of the national government in Turkey showed interest purely in the historical heritage of the city and the performing arts. In the visual arts, on the other hand, there was little state involvement, with the exception of a national prize and an existing academy of fine arts:

*So the idea was to provide the Istanbul people with an international and contemporary cultural event. In fact, that was the initial idea. So that was really due to the lack of such an organisation.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

What is fairly typical in this story is how changes often describe a pattern of before/after the establishment of İKSV by the Eczacıbaşı family in 1973. That is, before and after

corporate investment became engaged in the art field. Thus the involvement of corporate families in the Istanbul art scene is depicted as a land mark event in the transformation of the city into an important hub of the visual arts. As my interviewees claim, these changes have further brought about an art scene that is less peripheral, turned Istanbul into a cultural metropolis, and helped it attain a global position in the arts world today.<sup>8</sup>

The birth of the Istanbul Art Biennial in 1987 is often singled out as another watershed moment for the Istanbul art scene and its increasingly international orientation. This is again a moment that highlights the connection between the investment of corporate and other non-state actors in culture and the arts. According to many of my interlocutors, the Istanbul Biennial managed to create a greater influx of artists and curators into Istanbul. It fostered a circle of experts in the arts sector that in turn initiated a network of cultural brokers and artists in the city.

*[For the Biennial] we always had about 80-90 of the artists coming from abroad, statistically. [...] So that created a sort of international platform in Istanbul. But that is a temporary platform because it is only taking place every two years. [...] But of course all those people or institutions that had come to Istanbul or had heard of Istanbul through the Biennial they built up other connection or networks or partnerships with other actors and institutions.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

Also frequently mentioned are two art platforms and exhibition spaces that opened up in the early 2000s, Proje4L, and Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center (from now on referred to as Platform Garanti). These two organisations saw in an era of permanent engagement in transnational exchanges in the arts of the city. Proje4L developed exhibitions with international curators, while Platform Garanti organised an international residency program and hosted international exhibitions. While these exchanges managed to reach beyond the Biennial's temporary limitations, the two

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<sup>8</sup> In the subsequent sections of this chapter (p. 33) I will further elaborate on the connection between the corporate Eczacıbaşı family, İKSV and the İstanbul Modern.

projects were faced with problems of sustainability. However, these projects did manage to instigate a strong exchange of artists, critics, and research fellows circulating in the Turkish art world and created a stimulus in the development of the art scene in Istanbul.

The above narratives which are based on landmark events and watershed moments were also called into question by some of my interlocutors. While these events, which marked the above mentioned moments of transition, came up in most of my interviews, in some cases more sophisticated interpretations were voiced. For instance, Vasif Kortun, the founder and current director of Gallery SALT, said in our interview:

*So I mean there are of course before and afters but how harsh these before and afters are, is up to question. Because basically there are quite a few moments. We used to take '83 as a kind of breaking point, the beginning of Turkish avant-garde exhibitions and all of that stuff. Three years after the coup d'état when the first instances or phases of normalisation take hold. And then the second break would be of course [...] 1989 for many reasons. Not directly related to the art world. But you know the Berlin wall and the bicentennial of the French Revolution.*

*Vasif Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

The criticism of narratives of ruptures and watershed moments is important because it moves beyond the simplifications of a narrative of before/after, in which a crude picture of the development of cultural policy is drawn (Karaca 2010:133). The narrative of ruptures has a tendency to obscure historical continuities (Jardine & Brotton 2000) as well as transnational continuities that describe Turkey within the framework of European modernisation rather than as a special and deficient case thereof. Vasif Kortun in our interview stressed the continuities rather than the ruptures that can be seen between Istanbul's development into a cultural metropolis and other cities of similar importance. As Vasif Kortun once again pointed out:

*The whole transformation of London - same story one to one. The cleaning of the Thames, the cleaning of the water body in Hong Kong, the cleaning of the Bosphorus: the same narrative. They are all kind of looking at each*

*other and feeding from each other obviously. The whole idea is making a city around, branding a city around these concepts.*

*Vasif Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

As Vasif Kortun's account drew attention to, it is the continuities between Istanbul and other cosmopolitan cities and similar shifts in the art world that were occurring in all of them at the same time, that is in the 1980s.

At this point, I would like to emphasise a recurring theme which emerged in all interviews, namely the striving to 'catch up' with the standards of 'the West'. Perhaps I can best illustrate this point by referring to the first major blockbuster exhibition in Istanbul. This exhibition was evaluated as a moment of transformative significance. As Güler Sabancı stated in an interview with the Guardian newspaper: "If we can meet the standards to exhibit Picasso, that puts us alongside world-class museums."<sup>9</sup> The concept of 'belated modernity' is still deeply ingrained in the narratives and theories on cultural change in Turkey and is often used as an overarching explanation for all deficiencies in Turkish political life.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the inclusion of Istanbul into transnational circuits is more often than not framed as a form of closing the gap with 'the West'. The internationalisation of Istanbul's cultural field hence constitutes an important catching-up moment. And as Karaca, among others, has pointed out, the idea of a deficit in the Turkish art scene situates corporate actors and patrons as "documenters, guardians, and motors for modernisation" (Karaca 2010:121).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Rainsford (24.11.2005) . Turks Relish First Picasso Show. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 19.01.2012 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4466024.stm>.

<sup>10</sup> The self-crafted Western identity that Turkey has created for itself is deeply engrained in an occidentalist discourse in which Europe is both a model to aspire to and yet also a source of constant rejection (Ahiska 2003).

<sup>11</sup> I will return to this point later on in the 3rd chapter, pp.65-66, when discussing the role of the transnational imagination in the national.

## 2.2. Symbolic Capital and the Competition between Corporate Families

The most prominent corporate names primarily associated with the Istanbul culture and arts scene are those of Sabancı, Koç, and Eczacıbaşı. The three museums that are at the centre of my research, the Istanbul Modern, the Sakip Sabancı Museum, and the Pera Museum, are each affiliated to and funded by one of these corporate families. Their mission statements highlight the philanthropic responsibility to share art with the public. As my informants agreed, the engagement of these families in culture and the arts is not entirely a philanthropic act but must also be considered as prestige projects which promote the image of their corporations. The director of the Pera Museum, Özalp Birol, which is affiliated with the Koç family, emphasises how the museum is such a prestige project representing a marriage of philanthropic engagement with good business strategy:

*I am strongly observing that the prestige gain cannot be purchased by money, cannot be created via or through the commercial advertising campaigns and regular public relations events. It is a different kind of positioning and status in society. In my opinion, Turkish capitalists started to understand the value of the prestigious positioning which could be provided via the arts and culture during the last 20 years. [...] And they wanted to leave something to the public. Because this also relaxes a person. If you have everything, you have to share something with people. And then if you do this, frankly, local or international institutions will automatically appreciate what you are doing. If you come up with too strategical manoeuvres, approaches etc. you might be appreciated because of your strong position in commercial markets for advertising purposes by the media. But on the other hand, if you are a real philanthropist and a real qualified art supporter, people or some of the qualified institutions will be aware of this distinction.*

*Özalp Birol, Pera Museum, 07.06.2012*

What Özalp Birol speaks about is not a phenomenon which is particular to the Turkish context. Wu (2002) has analogously described this process in the context of private

museums and cultural institutions in the USA and the UK since the 1980s. In her words, the “motivation of involvement became part and parcel of a corporate strategy” (2002:29). This emphasises how cultural engagement is not only a matter of investing in the arts, but more strategically promotes a unique corporate image, an identity or personality.

As all of my interlocutors suggested, the question of prestige and competition between the corporate families is central to the development of the cultural institutions. Çelenk Bafra describes the Istanbul museums as prestige projects opened by the families concerned with the expressed objective of keeping up in the cultural sponsorship competition:

*[M]ore or less from every family one member would make a collection but they never had the intention to build a museum and to show [their] collection. But once another actor creates a museum, the other wants to compete. It is not only the families, but also other big corporations [that] want to compete in this sense.*

*Celenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

In the Turkish context, investments by corporate families in private museums also equate to direct capital benefits. Investing in culture and the arts bring tax incentives, although these may not be as extensive as in other countries (interview with Özlem Ece on 08.08.2012). The permanent exhibition of the families' collections also significantly increase the value of the art works displayed (Karaca 2010:123). The social responsibility of the corporate actors are described as a natural engagement in the cultural realm in which collectors become philanthropists by opening their collections to the public, whether or not ulterior motives exist. Rather than regarding these motives as a paradox, it is considered a natural marriage of cultural engagement with business instinct. The involvement of corporate actors has also profoundly changed the goals of the museums. A museum model has developed in which corporate promotion is the central motive. The visibility of the corporation is achieved through advertisement and



publicity of the museum (Rectanus 2007:385). This means that museums in Istanbul today have become increasingly attendance driven.

The symbolic capital (Bourdieu and Darbel 1969, Bourdieu 1986) gained by involvement in the arts has been discussed by Bourdieu as a resource of the individual through which certain privileges are obtained. These privileges are bestowed on the individual through prestige and recognition by other members of society. Symbolic capital can be easily converted into leveraging advantage, as well as into other forms of capital to optimise the individual's position in the social and political sphere. The concept of symbolic capital can be extended to include the distinction made between corporate families and hence the corporations themselves to gain prestige and build their image.

As Bourdieu and Darbel describe in their study of 1969, “The Love of Art”, the art museum is not merely a space for fostering aesthetic values. Rather, these aesthetic values become a part of the struggle for symbolic capital by which social structures are produced and reproduced.

In the corporate engagement to support cultural institutions, a similar struggle can be observed. Because the museum is an institution with great authority for defining aesthetic values, it is no surprise that this space is fiercely contested. Macdonald (1996) describes this struggle over museums as follows: “Precisely because they have become global symbols through which status and community are expressed, they are subject to appropriation and the struggle for ownership” (1996:2). In the context of Istanbul, Demet Yıldız expresses the following:

*Of course, this is only my personal understanding of the issue [of] culture and arts. As you know, that area is a very important component of the symbolic capital and now you know a lot of people have a lot of money. [So] there must be some sort of attraction. The group of people that is interested in art is getting bigger and then other people see this and also get involved in this field.*

*Demet Yıldız, İKSV, 29.05.2012*

Engaging in culture and the arts hence allows corporations to accumulate symbolic capital which positions them in social hierarchies of corporate actors. The involvement of corporations and other private investors has become attractive in the Turkish context because of the increasing interest and value that is being invested in the arts. In Istanbul, art is becoming a lifestyle marker, which the museums and attached corporations are trying to profit from.

The foundation of the museums is described as a service to the public, because art is conceptualised not as a pure commodity. The families with the means to collect are responsible for sharing the 'public good' that art is perceived as. As Karaca (2010) has emphasised, this engagement is more than mere accumulation of collectibles or commodities: “While collectors themselves may and often do speak of ‘their’ works in highly personal terms [...] – the very nature of the modern conception of art as a public good differentiates artworks from other collectibles, lets say stamps or vintage cars” (Karaca 109-110). The passion and love experienced by the collector towards his/her art is described by Suna and İnan Kırâç, the founders of the Pera museum, in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue “Portraits from the Empire”<sup>12</sup> as follows:

*But somehow in some corner of your mind, the feeling begins to grow that it seems as if you are hiding these objects from the eyes of the public, and preventing others from benefiting from them. When your collection begins to grow, and it no longer fits into your home, and you are forced to move some of the objects you have cherished into vaults and safes far from the light of day, this feeling becomes even stronger. The instinct to share, one of man's finest and unfortunately often unmanifested qualities, grows from one day to*

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<sup>12</sup> 'Portraits from the Empire' was Pera Museum's first exhibition from the collection of Suna and İnan Kırâç. As the catalogue described the exhibition: The exhibition Portraits from the Empire sheds light on a special part of this opulent world. Almost sixty paintings selected from the Suna and İnan Kırâç and Sevgi and Erdoğan Gönül collections bring us face to face with the peoples of the Ottoman world, their portraits and portrayals, sometimes very familiar and sometimes remote, even nearly foreign, in their physiognomies. These paintings, most of them created before the eye of the camera replaced the human eye, in the times when observing, studying, interpreting and depicting the world was the priority of painters, present the lost faces of an era long past with amazing reality and vividness.

*the next and eventually impels you to make certain decisions in order to share these valuable objects with a larger audience, with art lovers, with men of science, with the young, with the children.*<sup>13</sup>

The strong emphasis on the responsibility to the public, “the instinct to share”, as Karaca proposes, “places collecting art firmly within the parameters of philanthropic activity, and thus, the conceptions of modernity and progress frequently connoted with it” (2010:104). But this perception of philanthropy further allows the collectors to rationalise the central contradiction of treating art as a commodity (Karaca 2010:102). The different interests that come together in art, both as a commodity and as an object to which the collector has a passionate relationship, are joined in the conception of philanthropy. This double interest in the arts was not concealed in my interviews, but rather quite openly acknowledged, in fact treated as entirely natural. As Özalp Birol, the director of the Pera Museum interpreted the Kıracı family's motivation for opening the museum:

*They wanted to leave something or to give something to the public; they wanted to share their belonging with the public, firstly to create a good impression and a prestigious positioning and secondly, they understood the real value of giving.*

*Özalp Birol, Pera Museum, 07.06.2012*

Here, “the real value of giving” is considered a noble act of sharing art with those of lesser means. The depiction of making a contribution to 'the greater good' is one that follows on from the earlier concept of benefaction by the aristocracy (Bourdieu 1984). But in this case, the noble act also has benefits linked directly to business and profits of those engaging in the philanthropic activity. Hence, the “instinct of businessmen” as Özalp Birol, the director of the Pera Museum put it (interview of 07.06.2012), allows the corporate families to engage in the arts, but at the same time to exploit its utility. So the common feeling, he expressed, is that corporate families, in contrast to the state,

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<sup>13</sup> Suna and İnan Kıracı Foundation (2006) . *Portraits from the Empire. The Ottoman World and Ottomans from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century with selected works of art from the Suna an İnan Foundation Collection*, p. 8-9.

understood from an early stage the dual value that comes with the support of the arts and culture.

Since government funding for the visual arts was insignificant, particularly after the 1980s, this was a ready opportunity for corporate families to step into the breach and open their own cultural institutions. So rather than the government investing directly in the arts, it preferred to provide incentives for private engagement.

As I will describe in the following, the development of coalitions of interest between governmental and non-governmental actors that followed from the corporate engagement in the arts has shaped the Turkish art field profoundly since the 1980s.

### **2.3. Public-Private Coalitions of Interests**

As I have argued above, the 1980s saw an opening up of cultural engagement in the visual arts to corporate actors and their cultural foundations. Whereas for some years the prestige of sponsoring cultural institutions had gradually been handed over to the corporations, the government has recently been reclaiming interest in the arts sector. Today, government actors are taking up the role of 'partners' to private foundations. Another reason for these coalitions of interest between public and private actors is the very limited availability of state funding in the arts. These coalitions manage to benefit all partners in different ways. While the “corporate sponsors cast themselves as civil society actors” (Karaca 2010:129), the government can promote 'culture' without spending public funds on its maintenance. The coalition manages therefore to reconcile the vested interests of its partners. This point is illustrated by the following quotation from Çelenk Bafra:

*We of course have a brilliant museum of sculpture and painting which belongs to the Fine Arts Academy, but which has been closed since my childhood. So instead of taking the hard decision to restore and renovate the existing museum that the state had, which would be much more difficult to realise, but would be much better in the long run, they decided to kind of*

*leave the floor to private museums to make their life easier. Because [they knew that the private investors] would find their way.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

The symbiosis between the governmental actors and the Istanbul Modern allows for both partners to realise their interests. It puts the Istanbul Modern in the position of major representative of modern painting in Turkey, a role that would usually be fulfilled by the state. The museum still receives state support, but this takes non-monetary forms. The corporate family's art collection has the status of an authoritative guide to Turkish modern art through government sanctioning. In fact this collection represents the specific tastes of the collectors, the Eczacıbaşı family (Karaca 2010). This blurring of boundaries between national and private collection also has material gains for the actors involved. The Istanbul Modern's collection is a permanent loan to the museum, but still belongs to the Eczacıbaşı family. Hence, the taste of a particular collector is valued excessively merely due to its permanent exhibition and ensuing representativeness (Karaca 2010:227).<sup>14</sup> As Çelenk Bafra points out in the quote above, when state and corporate actors engage in coalitions, there are often short-term gains involved. The long-term reshaping of the museum landscape and the art market by private investors is often ignored.

Another very important area for collaboration between corporate actors and the government lies in cultural diplomacy. The reignited interest of the government in cultural policy is due to its impact on international relations. The interest in cultural policy as a leverage in Turkey's EU accession process is posited as having ignited governmental action. As Karaca (2010:17) has pointed out: “Since the 1980s funds for

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<sup>14</sup> As Karaca (2010:123) has summarised the position of the different collections of the corporate museums: “While in the case of *Sabancı* for instance the collection has been donated to the museum, the *Eczacıbaşı* collection (i.e. the permanent collection of the Istanbul Modern) as well as the paintings exhibited in the *Pera Museum* have remained in private ownership and are only on loan to the museums by the respective families (at least at the time of my research). This means that apart from the increase in value that these artworks experience, the owners can withdraw them from the institutions whenever they see fit.”

contemporary art projects were, comparatively speaking, rather small, but this has been changing as the Turkish authorities have discovered the ‘soft power’ of cultural exchange and arts programs in diplomatic efforts within EU negotiations”. ‘Culture’ as a source of engagement in international diplomacy has become in many ways a new facet of policy-making. Going beyond mere engagement, culture can hence be used in order to bargain leverage and exploited as a political tool.

The state takes an active part in funding cultural events which involve promoting Turkey on the international stage. Such international promotion of Turkey, including projects like the Biennial, or the exhibition of Turkish art in the Netherlands to mark the 400 years anniversary of Turkish-Dutch diplomatic relations, is particularly favoured by the government. To quote directly from an interview:

*Well, especially through the Biennial, the state itself understood the fact that the visual arts [are] a tool that can be used for tourism, international recognition and prestige and integration or call it whatever you like. So they also understood that culture and arts in general is a good area for international relations and diplomacy. So now [the state is] playing that card. And all the institutions are also okay with that because we never had the public funding and that's the only way to get the public funding for a project.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

Discourses concerning ‘culture’ are being used expediently (Yudice 2003) in policy formulations and are adopted in current agendas in order to foster social and economic development (Barnett 2001). This shift in the governmentality discourse from political and economic policies to one concerning culture creates “a transformation in what we understand by the notion of culture and what we do in its name” (Yudice 2003:9). The engagement bestows those organisations, corporate actors, and governmental bodies that act in its name with the power of formulating what constitutes culture.

The ‘400 Years of Dutch-Turkish Diplomatic Relations’ was an umbrella project under which large sums of public as well as private funding could be mobilised for projects by the museums and galleries of Istanbul. This project is a case in point, in which culture

and the arts were used as instruments of cultural diplomacy for the development of international political and economic relations. The '400 Years of Dutch-Turkish Diplomatic Relations' is a program which is taking place throughout the year of 2012. The celebration is being marked by a number of exhibitions and projects that are jointly sponsored by Turkey and the Netherlands. The implementation of these projects is transferred to private cultural institutions.

What I aim to shed light on is the coalitions of interests between governmental and non-governmental actors that international art exhibitions create. I wish to discuss the forms in which the culture discourse is instrumentalised for the diverging goals of the actors. Similarly to the 'public-private partnerships' (PPP) that are widespread in Turkey in the construction sector, this concept is also flourishing in the world of private art sponsorship (Artun 2011b). However, while this coalition of interest is openly discussed in the construction sector, in the arts it is only reluctantly admitted to. Museums do not wish to acknowledge that they have an amicable relationship with the Istanbul municipality but rather speak of 'toleration' of their cause. To quote from my interviews:

*The municipality make life easier, that's the only thing they do.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

*Let's say they don't interfere.*

*Demet Yıldız, İKSV, 29.05.2012*

Another way of gaining strong political leverage is when government agencies selectively bestow non-government actors with monetary support. As Çelenk Bafra from the Istanbul Modern described, financial support from the central government is allocated so erratically that it cannot be depended on. Furthermore, there are no clear rules either in the selection of projects to be funded or the frequency and consistency with which such funding is provided. As Çelenk Bafra stated in our interview at the Istanbul Modern:

*So to give you a concrete example for the Istanbul Biennial, we never had a permanent public funding. But we had applied for each and every Biennial to the Turkish promotional fund that comes from the prime minister directly, from the ministry of culture and from the ministry of foreign affairs. [...] Compared to the application we were making to the other international institutions, it was a simpler application. But then the negotiations, this new form of application process, let's say, was continuous up until the opening of the Biennial. And usually even towards the end of the Biennial we never knew if we had the public funding or not and if we did have it, how much we would have. You see what I mean? We had something, but all through my directorship we never had more than 10% of the overall budget. But that's a big change. If you don't have that 10%, you can basically be bankrupted and be fired as a director.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

The support that the state devotes to the Biennial is often portrayed as the bare minimum. The spaces offered to the Biennial are provided by the state free of charge or for a token fee. As Demet Yıldız illustrated this point in our interview:

*The support that we received from the Metropolitan and Beyoğlu Municipality is mostly not any direct financial support but it is in terms of venues etc. But [...] although we receive this support, we have to rent the regular venue, the Antrepo. [...] And yes the state support, the governmental support is very meagre.*

*Demet Yıldız, İKSV, 29.05.2012*

It becomes fairly apparent upon closer reading, that the support granted by the municipality and at times the central government to the museums and cultural foundations is actually much more substantial than these comments reveal. Cultural organisations, institutions, as well as art spectacles are in fact very dependent on the support that they receive particularly from the Istanbul municipality. As in the case of the Istanbul Modern and the Sakip Sabancı Museum, the opening of the museums was facilitated and sanctioned by the government. State representatives were active partners in the opening ceremonies. Further, many of the exhibition spaces used by the museums today were provided by the government or the municipality. The Istanbul Modern is a case in point. A former warehouse on the shores of the Bosphorus in Tophane, which



was built in the 1950s, was made available and converted to the current museum space from 2003. This building now houses the Istanbul Modern.

*Directly in 2004 after this building was used for the Istanbul Biennale, the Prime Minister made an announcement during the hot moments of the negotiations between the EU and Turkey and announced that the state will give this building to the Istanbul Modern. Although we are paying a rent for it, it is [...] a symbolic rent.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

Bafra's comment highlights the interest that lies behind government support. The involvement of the government is not merely an interest in a flourishing art scene, but also in the EU relations and the perceptions that go hand in hand with the status of a European cultural capital. As she points out, to be considered a European capital, it is necessary to boast a museum of modern and contemporary art. As she stated in another quote from our interview:

*That's also an attempt in following Europe [...]. To prove that Turkey is as European as all the other countries because [...] in a globalised city or country you would have of course historical heritage and museums and cultural history [...]. But you would also have a modern art museum and more and more you would also have contemporary art museums. So [...] they were trying to fill this gap.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

The narrative of total state withdrawal from cultural policy is very common amongst cultural actors in Istanbul. Most importantly, the state is regarded as merely non-interventionist that neither engages, nor interferes in the foundations' policies. In fact, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as the Istanbul Municipality often do support and claim events under their name. I wish to go along with Karaca's (2010: 189) discussion in opposing the prevalent view of a lack of Turkish cultural policy by considering the consequences of such passive government engagement. The lack of direct intervention by governmental actors successfully channels the engagements of the

private arts sponsors, which in turn create a form of state leverage over the cultural institutions. The government or municipality leaves the implementation of exchange and promotion projects to the museums and cultural institutions that are already involved in transnational circulations in order to create a favourable division of labour. This way of handling cultural policy by the governing bodies is redefining the parameters of governance in art. The municipality assumes the role of a semi-autonomous actor, both supporting and competing with actors in the art field. Similar to what Winegar has described for the art world in Egypt, we can trace here the “emergence of a new kind of government, in which the state releases sovereignty over the mobility of its internationally oriented subjects” (2006b:176). Rather than approaching neoliberal cultural policy as a mere disengagement of the state, it should rather be regarded as taking place in coalition and competition between the state and the corporate actors. Although the relationship of 'state actors' and 'corporate actors' is often fragmentary and fraught with incongruities, both actors have a vested interest in these forms of art funding.

The Sakip Sabancı Museum's 'Rembrandt and his Contemporaries' show is a case in point. While the Sakip Sabancı Museum puts on a highly prestigious exhibition, the Dutch sponsors receive considerable publicity through media coverage as well as high visibility through their sponsorship. The Sabancı Corporation and family as founders of the museum, as well as donors of the museum's collection, gain prestige and publicity. The state, on the other hand, manages to create a flourishing cultural scene in Istanbul through the coalitions and the hands-off approach that they employ.

But it is precisely these connections between private and public actors that have moved the city of Istanbul into the focus of the international art world. As Demet Yıldız from İKSV states:

*It is not possible to single out one actor or one event as pivotal in establishing Istanbul as a cultural hub and space.*

*Demet Yıldız, İKSV, 29.05.2012*

Civil society actors, such as NGOs, corporations, and foundations are developing into protagonists of cultural policy. In the course of these coalitions, the interaction between the various agents becomes difficult to tease apart. In the further course of this chapter, I will discuss how 'assemblages' of various actors are engaged in formulating cultural policy.

## 2.4. Network Governance

Network governance is a term used by Kurt (2009) to describe a situation in which non-state actors begin taking action on policy formulation and implementation. This allows cultural actors in Turkey to share the sovereignty of policy engagement that was previously regarded as a prerogative of the state. As Kurt argues, due to the complexity of problem-solving in a globalised world, new coalitions between state and non-state actors are being sought and “[v]arious international, national, and local actors find the opportunity to challenge the monopoly of the central authority on deciding and imposing policies” (2009:2). Art exchanges could be regarded as a form of policy-making through which networks of transnational organisations participate in shaping foreign policy.

A case in point is İKSV<sup>15</sup>, the Istanbul Cultural and Arts Foundation which has tellingly come to be known in Turkey as the unofficial Ministry of Culture (Bydler 2004). İKSV has taken on the role of cultural policy advisor, addressing policy proposals to state, NGOs, and cultural institutions in the interests of finding a common ground for collaboration. As Özlem Ece, responsible for cultural policy development at İKSV described to me, it cannot be said that İKSV has taken on this task in direct coalition with the state. It is rather that, seeing that cultural policy in Turkey is lacking, İKSV has taken it upon itself to develop and formulate this policy. In Özlem Ece's poignant

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<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of İKSV's alignments with actors in the Turkish art scene see Sibel Yardımcı (2005) . *Küreselleşen İstanbul'da. Bienal*. İstanbul: İletişim.

comment below, İKSV apparently regards itself as on an equal footing with the government in this case:

*Of course, one reason [of our engagement] is to fill a lack, because cultural policy unfortunately does not really exist in Turkey. But we are trying to create a platform in which all participants are engaging together. We organised a workshop to which we invited the government and they were part of a round table, not moderating, but as one member of the discussing partners.*<sup>16</sup>

*Özlem Ece, İKSV, 08.08.2012*

İKSV sees itself as justified in taking responsibility for the development of a cultural policy through its experience in the cultural sector. İKSV hence simply assumes the role of formulating policy proposals and taking action. This process not only challenges, but also includes the governmental authority on deciding and imposing policies. As Kurt has described civil society engagement in the context of Turkey: “As these actors have begun to demand a broader arena of influence in the process of policy making, the political authorities and other non-state actors have begun to be accepted as partners in the policy-making process” (Kurt 2009:1). As Vasıf Kortun has stated this demand of influence by the non-governmental actors most pointedly:

*If you are running the cultural world of the city we should be recognised as such. Very soon we will create a much stronger alliance of private institutions. Because we have weight you know.*

*Vasıf Kortun, SALT*

The demand for network governance has resulted from a diversification of the demands that are addressed towards decision makers, as well as the potential for their solutions. Therefore it is assumed that experts in the field, such as İKSV, have more profound expertise, particularly on demands and problems that transcend the boundaries of the nation state (Kurt 2009). Hence, the interdependency of the actors, both national and

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<sup>16</sup> Translated by the author from an interview conducted in Turkish.

international, is sought to formulate problem-based solutions. So to reiterate, in the specific case of the platform that İKSV has introduced, all actors entering the discussion are regarded as equal partners in the policy-making process.

İKSV has made strong partnerships with the state. The foundation has even taken upon itself the responsibility of representing Turkey at the Venice Biennial. Although İKSV presents itself as a civil society foundation, the organisation was founded and is still funded today largely by the Eczacıbaşı group, the corporate family that also founded the Istanbul Modern in the 1990s.

So through such culture and arts foundations, corporate sponsors manage to present themselves as civil society actors. While some corporates act through organisations, other cultural institutions are directly connected to the corporations.<sup>17</sup> However, as I wish to describe, where the differentiation between corporation and cultural institution is made, it rarely works as a real separation. Looking at the triangle between Istanbul Modern, İKSV, and the Eczacıbaşı holding, it becomes clear how intricately interwoven many of these institutions and corporations are, beyond what they themselves claim. The Istanbul Biennial, as well as other festivals was initially sponsored by Eczacıbaşı, but over the years the sponsor base has diversified to support their growing program.

The Istanbul Biennial's main sponsor today is Koç holding, another one of the largest corporations in Istanbul. The Istanbul Biennial and Koç holding have over the last years often come into criticism for having the corporate name emblazoned more prominently than the logo of the Biennial itself. This criticism depicts the problematic influence that coalitions of interest can have on the art world. Coalitions driven by short term mutual interests in specific projects are set up to foster the larger interests of the partners involved.

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<sup>17</sup> The Eczacıbaşı family operates mostly through the foundation İKSV. Eczacıbaşı, as described above has also founded the Istanbul Modern independently of the foundation. Pera Museum also operates through a foundation whose head, Özalp Birol is not part of the Koç family himself. The Sakip Sabancı Museum is connected directly to the Sabancı University. Platform Garanti, as is the case for its successor institution SALT, are directly founded and supported by Garanti Bankası.

## 2.5. Governance through Culture

As we have seen, coalitions of governmental and corporate interests have been profoundly shaping the art market. The Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' describes the process in which the exercising of political power is bound up in multiple alliances and through the work of diverse authorities and institutions. 'Assemblages' describe a complex ensemble of diverse actors and institutional fields. This term allows us to think about multiple actors that, through their fragmentary practices operating between and across nation-states, create forms of governing. The art field in Istanbul today is a contested terrain where different institutions and actors compete in formulating the content and meaning of what constitutes culture. These contrasting views of the meaning of 'culture' turn into a 'problem' of government. In this way the discourse of culture becomes governable by those actors who engage in its discourse. The interventions that are made in the name of culture profoundly shape the meaning of what constitutes culture.

The articulation of a transnational event culture in contemporary Istanbul is not necessarily the product of a coherent strategy and its implementation. It is recontextualised on the national level in ways that “code heterogeneous contexts and objects in terms that are amenable to control and valuation” (Ong & Collier 2005:11). The concept of culture becomes a pliable and docile tool for the governance of diverse contexts. This enables a form of governmentality that does not depend on physical coercion and force. The assemblage of actors engages in the formulation of culture's scope. This can reach from the utilisation of cultural engagement for the fostering of economic ends to its use in diplomatic relations.

To give a specific example, Ali Artun described to me in our interview how the activities surrounding the previously mentioned program in celebration of 400 years of Turkish Dutch diplomatic relations, was in fact a form of fostering economic relations

and political understanding between the countries today. As Ali Artun, the director of Galeri Nev stated in our interview:

*For example, most of the ongoing international exhibitions and other artistic activities are sponsored by Holland. There is a kind of Flemish revival. Why? Because it is the 400 years of Turkish-Dutch diplomatic relations. Now all the activities in Salt, in Istanbul Modern, the Rembrandt exhibition in the Sakip Sabancı Museum [are connected to this anniversary]. And there is also the fact that Dutch operations are the major actors in the Istanbul stock market. [W]hen they launched this celebration and all the activities, some Dutch authority announced that it was the celebration of both this 400th birthday, plus [the] interaction in finance.*

*Ali Artun, Galeri Nev, 02.05.2012*

The cultural programs that were connected to the Dutch celebrations were hence centred on diplomatic and economic relations between the Netherlands and Turkey. The program was carried out by exchanging exhibitions between museums and other cultural organisations of the countries involved. The financial support also came from both Turkish and Dutch public funding, as well as from the private Dutch companies and investors operating in Turkey. The Sakip Sabancı Museum's 'Rembrandt and his Contemporaries' exhibition was co-sponsored by the Turkish and Dutch governments and supported almost exclusively by Dutch companies operating in Turkey.<sup>18</sup> These connections between Turkish and Dutch private investors, as well as the state actors was

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<sup>18</sup> A quote from Sakip Sabancı Museum's website on the exhibition 'Rembrandt and his Contemporaries' describing the event and its sponsors: "As Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum (SSM) celebrates its 10th anniversary, it opens the exhibition "Where Darkness Meets Light... Rembrandt and His Contemporaries - The Golden Age of Dutch Art" to the public. The exhibition marks the 400th year of diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Netherlands and features works from the Rijksmuseum as well as one of the world's leading private collections, which are being displayed for the first time in Turkey. The Turkish and Dutch governments are the diplomatic co-sponsors of the exhibition, which is supported by a number of major Dutch companies operating in Turkey. The main sponsors are Sabancı Holding and ING Bank; another one is the Philips company. The exhibition is being held with contributions from Unilever and Shell and the service sponsors are Grand Hyatt Hotel, the Park Hyatt Istanbul-Maçka Palas Hotel and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines." Retrieved on 10.05.2012 at <http://muze.sabanciuniv.edu/page/where-darkness-meets-light>

analysed by Ali Artun, the owner of Galeri Nev, as a cultural program arranged for the economic and political gain of the partners involved.

The scope that culture is now able to engage in, from economic amelioration to forging of diplomatic relations, has given the cultural sphere a previously unknown protagonism. The heterogeneous contexts in which culture is used today has carried out a transformation in the meaning and use of culture. As Karaca describes the utility that culture has gained:

*Much of the political productiveness of culture as a vehicle for governance, including its manifestation in cultural and arts policies, lies exactly in its conceptual capacity to continually produce – and bridge – slippages between these seemingly discrete definitions of culture*

*Karaca 2009:28*

This concept of 'utility' of culture is new insofar as it transforms culture from an exception to a commodity, leading to an increasing treatment of culture as a resource like any other (Yudice 2003).

European foreign policy has been developing for the last two decades “from a governance *of* culture to one *through* culture” (Karaca 2009). Governance has become increasingly important for an understanding of new processes of governing in which both civil society and the state take on new roles. Foucault's (1991) conception of 'governmentality'<sup>19</sup> questions the importance of the state as the sole bearer of power. Governmentality is bound up in multiple alliances and through the work of diverse authorities, power hence not being a top-down chain of orders, but rather a capillary, imbricating effect. This allows us to understand the multiple actors in the Turkish culture scene as policy-makers in this process rather than mere peripheral agents in a governmental process. The use of 'governmentality' as a concept for analysis of the Istanbul art world is fruitful, I believe, because it allows us to engage with 'cultural brokers' not as a case of bottom-up resistance, as Karaca (2010) describes the interest of

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<sup>19</sup> From a lecture series held by Michel Foucault in 1978 under the title 'Governmentality' published in *The Foucault Effect*, eds. Burchell, G. & Miller, P. University of Chicago Press.



much research in cultural studies, but rather to engage with the governmentally productive aspects of cultural policy. “[T]he anthropological analysis of the art world has been more comfortable with a notion of cultural politics ‘from below’ than cultural policies ‘from above.’” (Karaca 2010:7) The understanding of cultural policy as a powerful discourse hence should allow us to understand the forms in which 'culture' has become an indispensable instrument for foreign and domestic policy. While culture is considered on the one hand to be the largest difficulty in international understanding, it is at the same time regarded as the solution to these very problems (Yudice 2003). As two of the most prominent advocates of culture, UNESCO and the EU have created projects in the name of conserving culture and in fostering cross-cultural dialogue. 'Culture' has hence become an arena that can be managed and for which explicit policies have to be formulated.

The use of cultural engagement for ends such as fostering international relations has long taken a hold also in Turkish foreign policy. This illustrates in particular the point I made earlier about governmental involvement in facilitating the opening of private museums in Istanbul. As the Istanbul Modern's opening ceremony shows, the founding of cultural institutions is important for the fostering of EU relations and the Turkish accession process. The opening of the Istanbul Modern coincided directly with the EU negotiation process and was therefore supported by the Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdoğan, in order to demonstrate Turkey's investment in culture and the arts. The engagement in the arts shows the double conception of culture, as equally problem and solution, that Yudice (2003) has described. While Turkey is considered, or considers itself to have a culture which is 'problematic' or even 'lacking', the opening of a modern art museum exemplifies its ongoing process of catching up with 'the West' and the logically ensuing rightful place as a member of the European Union.

The interest in cultural investment also needs to be considered on the international political arena. The Turkish geostrategic position between global political divides has been the subject of ongoing discussion over the last decade. As Vasıf Kortun pointed out

in our interview, a lot of money is being invested in the cultural scene because of Turkey's international position. Quoting from Vasif Kortun directly:

*Turkey is now in the centre of the playing field. Because it is under the 'radar'. Istanbul is now located in the power corridor.*

*Vasif Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

The foreign policy interests on an international level create, as Kortun argued, a great potential for the support of art in Turkey. The European Union has a long-standing interest in developing diplomatic relations through cultural programs. But also international foundations and corporations are taking a particular interest in supporting cultural programs in Turkey.

## CHAPTER 3

### CULTURAL BROKERS IN THE ISTANBUL ART WORLD

*Institutions don't make change, individuals do. Or individuals who run institutions do. That's how change comes around.*

*Vasif Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

In this chapter I wish to explore the agency of individuals in promoting change through the discourse of culture. Hence, I will focus on the role played by curators and directors, cultural brokers, as well as the audience of the Istanbul culture and arts scene.

#### 3.1. Directors and Curators

For attendance-driven museums and their corporate sponsors, attracting blockbuster exhibitions from abroad is contingent on the pivotal role of directors and curators. Hence, directors tapping into networks that can attract exhibitions of high calibre are widely sought after. For both the Sakip Sabancı Museum and Istanbul Modern, these connections are crucial in order to be considered a potential partner for acquiring collections of international stature. As Charlotte Bulte at the Sakip Sabancı Museum stated:

*[Nazan Ölçer] has a lot of connections, I mean in every museum around the world it is the same thing, you need to have lots of connections and people that you know.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

To be able to show an exhibition like ‘Rembrandt and his Contemporaries’, the Sakip Sabancı Museum is particularly dependent on its relations with curators abroad, as is the case for the director of the museum, Dr. Nazan Ölçer. As Charlotte Bulte further stated in our interview:

*We have the chance to have Nazan Ölçer, she is undeniably one of the most important persons in the art world in Turkey and she was the director of the Turkish and Islamic art museums for 30 years or something, and after she retired, she was asked to be the director of the Sabancı Museum which was just opening at the time.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

This has created a greater significance of interpersonal relations on the international art scene. As both Çelenk Bafra and Charlotte Bulte described, it was the directors or chief curators who were the important motors behind the development of internationalising the Istanbul exhibitions program. As Çelenk Bafra portrayed the impact of Rosa Martinez, chief curator during the initial years of the Istanbul Modern:

*[I]n the beginning, the chief curator of the museum was Rosa Martinez, who is very established internationally and a recognised curator. [O]ne year after she was appointed as curator of the Istanbul modern, she was appointed curator of the Venice Biennial. That shows that you are an international figure.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

Attracting exhibitions to Istanbul also depends on connections established by the young curators of the museums. The biographies of curators such as Çelenk Bafra demonstrate the international connections that young curators are required to bring with them.

Çelenk Bafra started her career in the arts as a coordinator and then as the director of the Istanbul Biennial from 2004 to 2008 at İKSV. She then worked in Paris for the ‘Saison de la Turquie en France’ as the artistic director of the visual arts section, an exhibition series of Turkish art in France organised by İKSV. She has worked on a plethora of different projects both in and outside of Turkey that have allowed her to gain both professional experience as well as to forge strong connections with international networks. For the last year she has been working as a curator for the Istanbul Modern. What is striking is how easily young actors move between the role of director and curator. Young directors are sought after in order to promote the international relations of their museum.

However, curatorial freedom on the part of the Istanbul curators is not particularly high. As the case of the “Rembrandt and His Contemporaries” exhibition at the Sakip Sabancı Museum shows, the curators in the Rijks Museum decided which pieces could be shown and which would remain in the museum in the Netherlands. Quoting directly from my informant:

*When you have package exhibitions, you work [with one collection]. [For this one] we worked with the Rijks museum. Their curators were in charge of selecting the pieces. They showed us what we could get and what we could not get.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

This lack of curatorial involvement by the actors in Istanbul implies that the distinction between ‘curating’ and museum administration is in practice often blurred. Hence, the curator’s role as nodes in transnational networks of museums is in these cases more central than their work in the conception of the exhibitions.

### 3.2. Cultural Brokers

I use the term 'cultural brokers', to refer to individuals who have managed to promote change in Istanbul's art world over the last decades. They have in particular opened up the art scene to international circulation and networks between artists, museums, galleries and cultural organisations. While these cultural brokers are often directors and curators in the galleries and museums of Istanbul, I wish to emphasise names of actors who are regarded as the actual change makers in the Istanbul arts scene. When speaking of Vasif Kortun and Çelenk Bafra, both their curricula vitae and their self-perception are much more diverse than the mere description 'curator' would suggest. 'Cultural brokers' have been particularly important in Istanbul because of the lack of governmental engagement in creating national and transnational connections in the art world. These brokers are the actual managers and organisers of the art world

As Vasif Kortun describes, change is fostered by individuals, whereas the names of institutions are often substituted for these active individuals. In Vasif Kortun's opinion, the changes which took place in the first moment of normalisation after the military coup in 1980 allowed an independent, avant-garde art scene to emerge. This movement, which was independent from governmental support, laid the foundations of the art world of Istanbul today. As Karaca (2010:19) has also noted:

*[S]tate institutions, especially after the 1980s coup, were seen as unreliable – or for political reasons undesirable – to work with among artists. This has led to a situation where a few key figures, especially curators and critics, emerged, who for many artists presented the only alternative for facilitating local exposure and fostering international connections.*

This lack of trust in the state was central for the emergence of the individuals who began shaping the art world. Particularly the development of a continuity of partnerships and exhibitions beyond the Istanbul Biennial was a task that was taken on by individuals with large transnational networks. Beyond the Istanbul Biennial, these links allowed a more sustainable connection between actors in Istanbul and abroad. The

two art spaces Proje4L and Platform Garanti, which were established by Vasif Kortun, were two early institutions in these transnational networks.

*That was, of course, mainly through Vasif Kortun, and after Vasif through Fulya Erdemci, the director of the biennial this year. It was through their international networks that people were coming here. So that's something to [...] emphasise. Although there was an institution, a structure and establishment, it was again through these personal networks that there was some international, transnational dialogue.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

Vasif Kortun is one of these central actors in the Istanbul art world. In 1998, Kortun returned from directing Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies in New York and opened an art space which he called the Istanbul Contemporary Art Project. He founded both Proje4L and Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center in 2001. Platform Garanti closed in 2007, and in collaboration with Garanti Bankası, Vasif Kortun opened SALT Beyoğlu and SALT Galata in 2011. The project includes spaces for research and experimental thinking and comprises about 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition and program space, as well as extensive archives on Turkish contemporary and modern art. Vasif Kortun has further curated and directed many international exhibitions and various biennials.

As Suzy Hansen has stated in an article for the New York Times:

*Most artists will tell you that Kortun, who is 53, is the father of Istanbul's art world. 'We can say, there was before and after Vasif,' one artist told me. 'In order to show your work at home or abroad, said another, you used to need Vasif.' And he's respected internationally.<sup>20</sup>*

Individuals, such as Vasif Kortun, have managed to form the international connections that have moved Istanbul into the limelight of the arts world. And it is cultural brokers such as Kortun and Bafra who are in a position to create connections in the transnational arena facilitating corporate engagement. In this way, corporate cultural projects create

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<sup>20</sup> Suzy Hansen, (10.02.2012) The Istanbul Art – Boom Bubble. *The New York Times*. Retrieved: 30.04.2012 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/magazine/istanbul-art-boom-bubble.html>

new power relations through which cultural brokers become highly influential individuals. Vasif Kortun's long-standing cooperation with Garanti Bankası, the largest private bank in Turkey, is a case in point. Through the engagement of Kortun, Garanti Bankası has opened one of the largest exhibition spaces in Istanbul.

The engagement with the international art world in the 70s and 80s is seen as the breeding ground for the upcoming generation of curators and artists. Vasif Kortun stated that with the return of these individuals from abroad in the early 80s, the Istanbul art scene received a huge impetus:

*And then there were those of us who were abroad and who were outside the country in the 80s and who were trained and educated in critical theory, in post-structural theory. So that's when we went from Foucault to Deleuze to Derrida to Roland Barthes, and it begins to enter the discourse.*

*Vasif Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

The education of these young curators has been forged on international connections, and this in itself distinguishes them from other cultural actors. To have been educated in Europe or the US bestows a distinction arising from a thorough confrontation with Western art.

The 'cultural brokers' of Turkey have managed to successfully create a necessity for their networking services. As the artist's quote in Hansen's article above illustrates, these individuals have gained prestige for their ability to network and have attained a unique position of power in the Istanbul art scene.

### **3.3. Audiences**

While 'service to the public' is a common trope of the Istanbul art world, the imagined receivers of this service are often described in highly ambiguous and contradictory terms. The quality of the visitors who rush to see blockbuster exhibitions falls



dramatically short of the ideal and desired museum audience. What is referred to as 'the Turkish public' provides a constant source of lamentation amongst the cultural actors due to its lack of critical engagement and interest. The reason is considered one of cultural background, as Hüma Arslaner, the manager of Paintings, Contemporary and Collection of Decorative Arts at Sakip Sabancı Museum, pointed out: “

*It is really important to educate the Turkish visitors because [visiting an art museum] is not part of their culture.*

*Hüma Arslaner, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

In my interviews with the curators of the visual art museums, they emphasised that the limitations of the visual arts scene in Istanbul are still sorely felt. All three museums run extensive education programs, both for adults and children, as a central part of their agenda. The burgeoning middle classes today are beginning to take an interest in gaining knowledge of the visual arts. Particularly workshops for young children form a major part of both the Istanbul Modern's and the Sakip Sabancı Museum's work. But also seminars for new collectors are offered by the Istanbul Modern in return for a high attendance fees.

While I visited Çelenk Bafra at the Istanbul Modern, a children's session was just under way. Sitting in the library of the museum waiting for Çelenk Bafra, I was able to observe a group of children engaging in a playful encounter with the field of art. As Çelenk Bafra stated in our interview:

*But we, as a museum, as the only actual modern and contemporary art museum in Istanbul with its permanent exhibition and a permanent ongoing educational program, we aim to develop the future audience. So in that sense we try to be instructive but we are never magisterial, so that we are not the teacher or the authority.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

Charlotte Bulte at the Sakip Sabancı Museum further pointed out in our interview (of 25.05.2012) that there is a great need to educate children in Turkey, a country in which

trips to the museum are not a normal pastime in most middle-class families. This is why, she argues, the museum puts a lot of effort and funds into creating its own public. The museums provide transportation for schools if they do not have their own resources for funding the trip to the museum. But also adult education is an important part of museum work. The Sakıp Sabancı Museum organises adult workshops on art history, as well as special workshops to accompany current exhibitions.

The stated aim of all three visual art museums is the education of their future public. The engagement with the public outside the museum through the use of social media was described by my interlocutors as a particularly important task in order to keep the visitors interested and updated on the general exhibition program beyond the blockbuster exhibitions. The museums attract further visitors by providing other entertainment such as movie screenings (Pera Museum and Istanbul Modern have their own cinema hall). They organise concerts and other events at their facilities in order to engage the public in multiple forms. The transformation of the museum into a multi-use site is not unique to Istanbul, obviously. Museums have acquired multiple functions including urban marketing and tourism, global branding, and visual consumption in many metropolises around the world (as Rectanus has similarly discussed 2002:383).

The museum has hence been turned from an elite space, into an “urban art spectacle” (Karaca 2010) in which its multiple functions turn it into a space to consume not only art, but also the various other forms of entertainment provided. To quote from two interviews with Çelenk Bafra from Istanbul Modern and Özalp Birol, the director of the Pera Museum:

*We have a cinema that is more appealing for the public than our exhibitions because as a discipline cinema is, of course, more popular than visual arts.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

*We want to bring different audiences to this market by organising screening activities, Pera film, for instance. Lectures, some unplugged pop, jazz concerts, exhibitions, some public events, art education programs etc. That makes Pera museum a kind of meeting platform from 7-77 age group of people from different cultures, different beliefs etc.*

*Özalp Birol, Pera Museum, 07.06.2012*

What is referred to as a 'cultural' insufficiency on the part of audiences is a common narrative that also resonates across into the broader Turkish art world. Art criticism is regarded as deeply 'underdeveloped'. The owner of Galeri Nev, Ali Artun, told me that the art world in Istanbul, though expanding dramatically and trying to position itself in the world market, is still largely lacking an internal critical debate.

He emphasised how museums are trying to exploit the increasing significance of art as a lifestyle marker to enhance their audience appeal. Ali Artun collects lifestyle magazines which cover the opening galas of the exhibitions in Istanbul. He says that, while these magazines are a 'no-go' in artist circles, they do shed a revealing light on the way in which the art world celebrates itself. It is this development of art to a lifestyle marker that makes the museum such a centrepiece of the expression of urban and social change.

To summarise, audiences acquire significance in two different ways. On the one hand, they are 'imagined actors' in the cultural scene of Istanbul, constantly depicted in prevailing discourses as lacking in education and critical insight. In this sense, they inform museum practices which target 'future audiences'. On the other hand, they also play an active role in the processes and discourses concerning culture. It is an audience that is simultaneously being shaped while also itself shaping the arts scene of Istanbul. In the following chapter, I wish to widen the discussion on how publics are imagined and how they are addressed through blockbuster exhibitions.

## CHAPTER 4

### BLOCKBUSTER EXHIBITIONS IN THE ART ECONOMY OF ISTANBUL

In the previous chapters of this thesis, I have discussed the role of corporations and their relations with public agencies in the art scene of Istanbul. I then proceeded to talk about cultural actors as significant intermediaries between the art world in Istanbul and the transnational scene. In this chapter, I would like to begin to describe emergent publics by focussing on blockbuster exhibitions. I will continue by illustrating how transnational circulation of art is changing the museum scene. Hence, I will dwell on a selected few blockbuster exhibitions and the flagship museums which sponsor them. My intention is to highlight their significance in cultivating 'new publics' in the metropolitan arena. Lastly, I will turn to the imbrication of the national and the transnational in this context.

#### 4.1. The Circulation of Transnational Exhibitions in the Istanbul Art Scene

The Picasso exhibition in 2005 at the prestigious Sakip Sabancı Museum marks the first of a series of blockbuster exhibitions which have taken place in Istanbul. As Güler Sabancı, the head of the Sabancı Corporation described the event:

*If we can meet the standards to exhibit Picasso, that puts us alongside world-class museums. It shows they trust us. [...] And of course, Picasso is*

*the symbol of modernism. We wanted to bring him here because we believe that Turkey is part of the West and a part of that modernism.*<sup>21</sup>

Since the Picasso exhibition, the Sakip Sabancı Museum has hosted transnational exhibitions, including Dali, Rodin, and recently Rembrandt, in a display of Dutch Golden Age art. Currently, the Sakip Sabancı Museum mounts two to three blockbuster exhibitions every year, as well as lending parts of its own permanent exhibition of Ottoman calligraphy to museums in major cities around the world, such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Louvre in Paris and the Guggenheim Museum, Berlin.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the Pera Museum, affiliated with the Koç family, currently devotes two floors of its museum space to new exhibitions from abroad, in addition to its permanent collection of family-owned Orientalist paintings. In 2011, for instance, the Pera Museum hosted a Frida Kahlo/Diego Rivera exhibition which managed to attract 140,000 visitors within 3 months, a number far exceeding the usual number of visitors over a whole calendar year.

In the case of Istanbul Modern, developing international exhibitions and establishing networks with museums abroad was part of the museum's agenda from its inauguration

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<sup>21</sup> Sarah Rainsford. (24.11.2005) . Turks Relish First Picasso Show. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 19.01.2012 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4466024.stm>

<sup>22</sup> From the website of Sabancı Holding:  
“In addition to hosting various exhibitions on its own grounds, the Sakıp Sabancı Museum has promoted its collections by lending works of art to other venues outside the country. Prior to the establishment of the Museum, selected examples from the calligraphy and painting collections of Sakıp Sabancı were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Harvard University Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Louvre Museum, Guggenheim Museum in Berlin and Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt between 1998 and 2001.  
Since its establishment, the Museum has loaned work to exhibitions such as “Mothers, Goddesses and Sultanas” held in Brussels in 2004 and 2005; “Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600-1600” held in London in 2006, and “Istanbul: The City and the Sultan” held in Amsterdam in 2006 and 2007.”  
Retrieved from: Sabancı Holding. 2000-2012. Strategic Units: Sabancı University Sakip Sabancı Museum. Retrieved 07.05.2012 at:  
<http://www.sabanci.com.tr/en/strategic-business-units/social-and-cultural-activities/sabanci-university-sakip-sabanci-museum/i-181>

in 2004. The Istanbul Modern also puts a strong emphasis on the promotion of Turkish art, as well as lending its own collection to museums abroad.

As I emphasised earlier, attracting exhibitions of transnational stature to Istanbul relies on the creation of partnerships with international museums. Such partnerships are often facilitated by personal relationships between curators or museum directors. As Çelenk Bafra described these partnerships:

*So it works in two directions. For different goals, for different starting points, because the aim in trying to organise exhibitions abroad is really for promoting art from Turkey and of course also promoting our own collection and our museum [...]. But bringing selections from international art institutions or working with them to develop projects together, that is something [...] to show to the public [in Turkey] what is going on abroad.*

*Çelenk Bafra, Istanbul Modern, 27.03.2012*

One significant aspect of such transnational exhibitions is the publicity campaigns launched to attract great numbers of visitors. In Istanbul, such 'blockbuster exhibitions' are a constant presence in the cultural agenda of the city.

#### **4.2. Blockbuster Exhibitions**

Blockbuster exhibitions are large spectacles with a dynamic profile, which address a wide public and offer visitors an insight into the international art world. An important aspect of such exhibitions is that they feature either names of world-renowned artists (e.g. Rodin, Rembrandt, and Picasso) or spectacular themes, such as the Byzantium exhibition at the Sakip Sabancı Museum. This means that they transform exhibitions of visual art into events which become not only associated with the corporate brand, but also part of the branding of the city itself. Such blockbuster shows circulate transnationally, travelling to various locations in the world to attract large publics to metropolitan museums. This is also what is happening in Istanbul. Blockbuster

exhibitions are widely publicised in the media and, through advertising campaigns launched by the museums themselves, attract huge audiences.

Thus for instance, the Rembrandt exhibition hosted by the Sakip Sabancı Museum was a grand success in the spring of 2012. As I mentioned above, the exhibition was put together by the Rijks Museum in Holland and included some of the great masterpieces of 17<sup>th</sup> century Golden Age Dutch art. It circulated not only to Istanbul, but to a number of other metropolises that similarly attract blockbuster exhibitions today, such as the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar and the Shanghai Museum, China.<sup>23</sup>

To host an exhibition of such calibre as ‘Rembrandt and his Contemporaries’ in Istanbul was only possible because the lending museum, the Rijks Museum in the Netherlands, was closed for renovations. This is a point that Charlotte Bulte from Sakip Sabancı Museum specially emphasises:

*[B]ecause they are closed right now [...] we were able to get those pieces. Because otherwise [...] you can't really get all the masterpieces we have downstairs if they are on display, because museums don't really want to give them. [T]hat is actually the big, big problem, also when you do a retrospective or an exhibition that is on a specific century, Golden Age Dutch art. [I]f you want to have all the representative amazing pieces, it is really difficult. [F]or this exhibition we were very lucky for instance to have*

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<sup>23</sup> As the online newspaper Art Daily News mentioned the exhibition in Doha, Qatar: “This spring, Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, will present The Golden Age of Dutch Painting: Masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum. The first major exhibition of Dutch art in the Gulf region, Golden Age will be on view from March 11 – June 6, 2011 in the temporary exhibition hall of the Museum of Islamic Art. The exhibition will feature 44 major paintings from the Rijksmuseum’s collection, illustrating 17th century Dutch society, landscape and lifestyle through the eyes of Rembrandt van Rijn, Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals and other Old Masters. An unprecedented loan exhibition, Golden Age marks the beginning of a cultural collaboration between Qatar and The Netherlands, and furthers QMA’s mission to encourage global cultural dialogue and promote intellectual exchange through partnerships with the world’s leading cultural institutions. The exhibition aims to inspire visitors to see similarities between the seemingly different worlds of Holland and Qatar by demonstrating the great impact of a small nation at a time when industry, ideas and culture flourished.” Art Daily News, 2011, ‘Qatar Museums Authority to Present “Golden Age” Masterworks from the Rijksmuseum. Retrieved 14.09.2012 at:

[http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int\\_sec=2&int\\_new=45607#.UFawRrJmS2Y](http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=45607#.UFawRrJmS2Y).

*the Rijks Museums, their collection, tour all [...] around. It didn't just come here, before [the Sabancı Museum] it went to Doha.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

What Charlotte Bulte's comments also reveal, is that major collections from museums abroad can only be in Istanbul for short periods of time and can only be planned at most one year ahead, rather than the common pattern of three-year plans in Europe and the United States. As a result, these can be described as 'packaged' exhibitions which leave little scope for personal contributions by domestic curators.

European and US American museums make large profits in loan fees for the blockbuster exhibitions. This and the fact that large quantities of art works are not able to be exhibited due to lack of space, are the main reasons why exhibitions of such calibre travel across the world to cities such as Istanbul. The museums of Istanbul, on the other hand, enjoy the great benefit from such exhibitions due to the numbers of visitors that these world-famous names attract. To quote from Charlotte Bulte again:

*I guess all the blockbusters exhibitions were in the beginning [just] to increase the publicity. It was just big names such as Picasso, Rodin or Dali. The museums in Turkey or Istanbul really need those names to get visitors. That is really a fact, that's what we've been [seeing], that's why we want to organise such big exhibitions.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

Of course, blockbuster exhibitions attract not only large audiences, but also corporate sponsors. As Nicholas Serota, the director of the Tate, London remarked: “[R]educed public funding for museums created more pressure to shift exhibition programming to blockbuster shows which attract larger audiences and corporate donors” (in Rectanus 2006:387). Thus, in many metropolises around the world, blockbuster exhibitions, as opposed to the more specialised cutting-edge exhibitions, have taken on a central role in the planning of museums relying on corporate funding. This is also emphasised by Albert Elsen (1986), who points out that attendance-driven museums, which have come to the fore since the 1980s, presuppose corporate sponsorship. As he describes it,



“blockbusters mean crowds, and crowds mean business” (1986:24). This also applies in Istanbul, where blockbuster exhibitions are of interest to the public because they provide access to art works that would otherwise be far out of reach. And in turn, the public visibility of such exhibitions creates a very powerful incentive for corporate patronage. Coming full circle, this now means that the marketing of exhibitions and attendant public relations have become an indispensable part of museum management. In this context, Sakip Sabancı Museum's publicity and public relations officer, İpek Yeşildağ, described to me the importance of advertising campaigns and the social media. Speaking with reference to the Rembrandt exhibition, she pointed out how, in addition to the high profile of the artist himself, the publicity campaign was crucial to make the exhibition ubiquitous in the city and for it to become a “must-see event”. In order to reignite public interest in the exhibition, the advertising slogan was changed during the second half of the run-time from “Karanlıkla Işığın Buluştuğu Yerde” (Where darkness meets light) to “One million people have seen this exhibition in the world, have you?” Below are some quotes from a conversation among interlocutors:

*[N]ow we are half-way through our exhibition and we are reminding [the public] of our exhibition. So this is like the second bomb of PR work, let's say. So now we are reminding people that they must see this exhibition and [that] the deadline is June 10<sup>th</sup>, so that they do not miss that.*

*İpek Yeşildağ, Sakip Sabancı Museum*

*I saw the new poster coming up. We changed the motto actually for the second part.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum*

*“One million people have seen this exhibition in the world, have you?”*

*Hüma Arslaner, 25.04.2012*

Such advertising campaigns are the greatest expense in the museum's budget. The crucial role of advertisement for blockbuster exhibitions is notable, because it illustrates

the role of exhibitions in the branding of corporations and the city. Since visitor revenues do not cover the cost of advertising, both national and international sponsors are crucial. In the case of the Rembrandt exhibition, sponsors include corporations from the Netherlands with a base in Turkey as well as governmental and non-governmental sponsorship from Turkey.

One additional aspect of blockbuster exhibitions emphasised by my interviewees is how they manage to attract segments of the public that would otherwise not consider visiting museums. To quote Charlotte Bulte again:

*[P]eople would just run to see the exhibitions because it was really like the trend or the thing to do. But this is very unique to Istanbul, I think, because people are not really used to being in interaction or near to such big names.. And because it is such a new thing for them.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

Her comments also reveal how museums have become trendy places and part of the new urban event culture of Istanbul which the young middle class wants to see itself a part of. What we are talking about is not just an exhibition, but an entire package of events, ranging from the exhibition itself, to cinema screenings and concerts, as well as to merchandise that allows the visitor to consume the art even beyond the museum's walls. In his research on museums and restaurants in Istanbul, Michael Kubiena (2011) emphasises how restaurants and cafes located in the new museums and galleries have developed a clientele of their own. He also points out how state-owned and operated museums are now following suit.

In the next section, I want to emphasise a different aspect of blockbuster exhibitions, namely, how they have become an arena not only between museums but between the host cities as well.

### 4.3. Museums as Flagships of the Metropolis

Hamnett and Shoval (2003) discuss the way in which the museum, as a space in contemporary metropolises, exemplifies the shift that has taken place from an industrial city to an economy that is based on service and culture. The metropolis, as they argue, is dependent on its status as a meeting point of international corporations. Transnational corporations rely on the metropolitan culture of the cities in which they are based. The attraction of culture and the international lifestyle their employees can enjoy makes it possible for corporations to flourish, and museums are given a new role as cultural anchors in the city.<sup>24</sup>

During the neoliberal turn, cities have been engaging in a branding of their space, which is constructed around cultural markets. The traditionally imagined city that radiates from a historic centre has been turned into a set of urban spaces of branding and consumption. The late twentieth century has seen a dramatic transformation in the structure of western capitalist economies. The era of mass production experienced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has, since the mid-1960's, increasingly given way to a 'post-industrial' services-dominated economy. While industrial production is still important, employment in this sector has fallen sharply, while on the other hand a strong growth in employment has been seen in financial, business and personal services and what are termed the 'cultural' industries. The scale and importance of this transformation has been most marked in cities which grew up in the nineteenth century and which in the last decades have been a locus of large-scale de-industrialisation and economic restructuring. While some of these cities are still struggling with the legacy of economic and physical decline, others have been successful in transforming themselves into centres of post-industrial production and consumption. In the process, the structure

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<sup>24</sup> There is a wide literature on the spatial and social aspects of Istanbul's transformation in recent decades, see for instance: Ayfer Bartu Candan and Biray Kolluoglu (2008) . Emerging Spaces of Neoliberalism: A Gated Town and a Public Housing Project in Istanbul. In *New Perspectives on Turkey* 39, 5-46.

of their economies and their employment base has shifted away from manufacturing to a more strongly service and culture-orientated economy.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of Istanbul, most of my interviewees trace the shift from an industrial to a service economy to the 1980s. As Vasıf Kortun narrates:

*The clearing of the Haliç from Industrial remnants or you know the former factory areas like Gültepe, Levent etc being developed for the first business centers. The opening of the Tarlabaşı artery to larger traffic and all of those things. [...] [M]id-80s is the first sea of change in terms of the city being reinvented and remade.*

*Vasıf Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

The emergence of a service-centred economy has brought with it a class of individuals migrating transnationally into cities of great prosperity, thus changing the lifestyles in many metropolises. In this neoliberal transformation of the city, some urban centers have managed to place themselves on the transnational map of circulation of services, such as the financial sector, while other cities have missed out. This uneven development under neoliberalism, in which some metropolises have prospered at the expense of others, is visible in the development of Istanbul's service sectors to the detriment of the capital Ankara.

In order for urban spaces to win out in the competition of neoliberal urban centres, the city needs to market itself. This 'branding' of the city takes place not only through physical spaces, but is also promoted through symbolic spaces.

*Selling and defining 'place' is a complex transaction, which requires the sale of what the city means, how it feels, and what it looks like, regarding both the tangible and the intangible attributes of particular urban spaces.*

*Kubiena 2011: 36-37*

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<sup>25</sup> For a series of articles which explore various facets of this transformation in Istanbul, see for instance: Deniz Göktürk, Levent Soysal and İpek Türeli (2010) . *Orienting Istanbul. Cultural Capital of Europe?* Routledge & Çağlar Keyder (1999) . The setting. In Keyder, Ç. (ed.) *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*. Landham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Not only urban investors, but also residents must be regarded as potential audiences and consumers. These residents/consumers need to be considered in city planning and regeneration projects, and their tastes must be taken into account.

*Culture is now a key element of urban competition, both in terms of civic pride and image and also in terms of its ability to attract both visitors and footloose national and multinational companies via the quality of urban life on offer to the large new class of educated professional and managerial workers.*

*Hamnett & Shoval 2003:233*

In this context, it is particularly the 'new middle class' or 'creative classes' who assume critical importance. This is a point I will return to later on in this chapter. What I want to emphasise here is how branding of cities through cultural consumption is also bound up with gentrification projects. Museums often become central factors in triggering the gentrification of entire neighbourhoods. Vasıf Kortun has described this shift in Istanbul:

*This is the first time of 'culture' connecting the old city to the new city, which is the first premise [for the urban changes]. They start building the new Galata Bridge which means that you now have a tram that will take you from the old city to this area. [So] the whole Galata area is being targeted for a continuation of the entertainment and leisure area. Hard to miss that all of that also comes with a new kind of entertainment culture sector in the form of biennials, [...] exhibitions and new exhibition institutions.*

*Vasıf Kortun, SALT, 22.06.2012*

It is therefore essential to take into account that post-Fordist capitalism is no longer oriented toward selling commodities as such, but as Harautyuyan, Özgün, and Goodfield have argued, “what it aims to sell are brands, events, lifestyles, and social practices constituted and saturated by consumption” (2011:483).

The development of tourism in these cities is a central marker of their drawing power for global capital flows. “The collective symbolic capital, which attaches to cultural capitals is of great importance and gives such places economic advantages over regional cities.” (Harvey 2002:9) The symbolic economy is becoming a central factor in the city's branding. Culture is becoming an industry which allows cities to attract tourists, as well as the 'creative classes' that are central to the establishment of transnational corporations and hence to attracting investment to the metropolis. Florida (2003, 2005) describes a new economy, in which no longer only technology and services, but rather human creativity, has turned into the defining feature of economic life. Cities, he argues, must attract these 'creative classes' through the development of 'hip neighbourhoods' and a thriving cultural scene.

In her seminal work on New York, Zukin suggested that, “[w]ith the disappearance of local manufacturing industries and periodic crises in government and finance, culture is more and more the business of cities: the basis of their tourist attractions and their unique competitive edge” (1995:1). By engaging in the development of the cultural industries, cities can seek to gain a stronger competitive position in the spatial division of consumption (Harvey 1989:9). Cultural consumption is a central marker of lifestyle and develops the city's cultural capital in transnational competition. Further, the cultural industries that cater for the growth in cultural consumption fuel the symbolic economy that they are a part of. “The growing number of new public spaces owes their particular shape and form to the intertwining of cultural symbols and entrepreneurial capital.” (Zukin 1995:2-3) Zukin described this transformation as one in which the symbolic economy is fuelled by a business elite who link their philanthropic engagement with a wish to imprint their identity on the city.

The museum has also undergone a central transformation in conjunction with ongoing neoliberal shifts in the urban arena. As Sudjic points out:

*Once [the museum] was a place that had instruction and the propagation of a particular view of the world as its underpinning. Now [the museum] has come to be seen as an urban landmark – a replacement for the missing agora, a place devoted to spectacle.*

*(Sudjic, 1993:143)*

This is what allows museums and cultural institutions to become such highly effective forms of corporate investment. Harautyuyan, Özgün, and Goodfield even go as far as saying: “[C]ontemporary art has not only become more hospitable to private funding but has directly borrowed from the vocabulary and operational modes of multinational corporations” (2011:480).

A good example may be Istanbul Modern's mission statement which articulates its 'global vision'. In its mission statement it defines itself as a museum that collects art to share with the public and also promote it on a transnational plain:

*As part of its commitment to sharing Turkey's artistic creativity with wide audiences and promoting its cultural identity on the international art scene, the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art hosts a number of interdisciplinary activities.*

*The Museum embraces a global vision to collect, document, preserve and exhibit creative works of modern and contemporary art and make them accessible to art lovers.<sup>26</sup>*

According to the 'global vision' of the Istanbul Modern, the museum sees itself as part of a transnational system. In this sense, it contributes to promoting and creating an interconnected cultural world. Here again we encounter the dual role of the museum in becoming a self-professed promoter of the 'global', as well a central actor in turning the city into a cultural metropolis.

Below, I will turn to how integration into a 'global' culture and transnationalism is imbricated in the national.

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<sup>26</sup> From the website of Istanbul Modern *About*. Retrieved on 14.12.2011 at [http://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/f\\_index.html](http://www.istanbulmodern.org/en/f_index.html)

#### **4.4. Transnationalism as National Imbrication**

Recent work in anthropology has tried to move away from the simplistic question of whether nation states have been undermined by global forces, and begun to examine the specific institutions and practices through which transnational flows acquire meaning locally. In the context of her recent research into Egyptian art markets, Jessica Winegar (2006b) argues that increasing transnational circulation of art works and artists does not necessarily imply total loss of state power under the impact of so-called 'global' forces. Her research emphasizes how the governmental incentives for the engagement of private investors in the arts sector have profoundly influenced the local art scene. So it is not the presence of the state but mechanisms of state intervention which have shifted. In my own discussion above, I have argued the significance of emergent coalitions between governmental and non-governmental actors in transforming the parameters of the art field in Turkey. This transformation has paved the way to new forms of governmentality, wherein national and international organisations become engaged in joint policy debates. This allows the corporate world to take direct action over the development of the city through the discourse of culture.

What I want to discuss below then is not the way in which the national loses out in an era of globalisation. Rather, through the use of the terminology of 'transnationalism', I want to emphasise how the movement of exhibitions into Turkey articulate the cosmopolitan imagination within the national. As Fernandes has argued: “[t]he production of 'the global' occurs through the national imaginary” (Fernandes 2006:611).

In analyses of Turkish modernity, numerous authors have emphasised how the gaze of 'the West' has been crucial in the creation of Turkish national identity. Thus for instance, Meltem Ahıska (2003) has pointed out that there is a deeply ingrained ambiguous relationship to the West through “Turkey's self-consciously crafted Western identity” (2003:351). The West, or Europe, is at the same time a source of constant frustration and



rejection (such as in the accession process to the EU) and yet is the desired object of the Turkish national fantasy.

This imaginary underpinned many of the discussions that I had with curators and directors at the Istanbul museums. They simultaneously described transnational exhibitions as part of a process of educating the public and 'catching up', while at the same time referring to them as demonstrating the equality between Turkey and the West in the sphere of arts and culture. Below are some excerpts which illustrate this paradox:

*Here there is such a little part of the population that is actually [...] into that kind of stuff, you know reads the cultural pages of the paper or [...] wants to see what's happening this week. So I think for people to know, to be aware of these kinds of exhibitions you need to bomb them, [...] that they really know that [an exhibition] is here. It is like that everywhere in the world, but I think that in Turkey, I mean in Istanbul, this is even more important.*

*Charlotte Bulte, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

*As I told you, this family, they collect for almost 30 years, but no-one was aware of that until they established this Pera Museum and carried out these local and international activities, collections etc. [...] Look at this magazine. This was the 6th year of the Pera Museum because we opened the doors in June 2008. The founders of the Pera museum are among the top 200 collectors in the world, this is one of the oldest and most prestigious magazines in the world.*

*Özalp Birol, Pera Museum, 07.06.2012*

As the comments above reveal, the need to 'catch the train' of European modernity, especially in the cultural realm, is expediently used by corporations for image-building purposes. This picture of a lack in cultural education turns the corporate families into the benefactors of a public that needs a helping hand to engage in a cosmopolitan lifestyle. This will in turn enable the Turkish public to finally be on a par with their national imaginary. The corporations, often working through a foundation, can hence posit themselves as civil society actors in the realm of culture.

As Güler Sabancı so tellingly pointed out in the opening of the Picasso exhibition, the exhibition signalled not only a new interest in Western art, but also pointed to Turkey's

taking up its rightful place on an equal standing with museums and the modernity of the West. To put it in different words, the exhibition of Picasso was not a matter of mimicking Western modernity but a symbol of Istanbul's equal standing with, for instance, London or Berlin.

In what follows below, I will attempt to highlight the museum's significance in cultivating 'new publics' through a cosmopolitan imaginary.

#### **4.5. The Cosmopolitan Imaginary and its Exclusions**

*Art has had a long-standing romance with cosmopolitanism and internationalism. The ideal cosmopolitan is distinguished by universal cultural competence and love of art. The Fine Arts is a sort of monument to the cosmopolitan community, their cultural heritage. This relationship acquires an international competitive aspect when international art is seen as a national asset.*

*(Bydler 2004:11)*

The quotation above highlights how appreciation of “international art” has been, and continues to be associated with the ideal of cosmopolitanism. In the context of Istanbul, the attractions of transnational exhibitions cannot be divorced from desires and aspirations of a new middle class who imagine themselves as part of a cosmopolitan culture which extends beyond Turkey. As many of my interviewees pointed out, the new wave of 'private' museums in Istanbul coincides with the growth of a 'new middle class' that wants to accumulate the symbolic capital associated with art.

For these new middle classes, art appreciation has become a lifestyle marker, increasingly associated with cosmopolitanism. Harautyuyan, Özgün, and Goodfield point out how this involves

*[...]a new cognitive mapping that connects identity to lifestyle [...] Social subjects have to learn how to participate in this signification process and consume meaning; they have to learn how to be interpolated, look back and*

*respond when they are called “modern individuals” and “contemporary world citizens”*

(2011:482)

Following this line of thinking, it is possible to argue that transnational art exhibitions allow audiences to imagine themselves as being a part of an international cosmopolitan public that takes part in and enjoys the same aesthetic as do the visitors seeing the exhibitions in Paris, New York, or Amsterdam.

The notion of the 'new middle classes' is a term often used to refer to urban strata who measure their desires and aspirations by the yardstick of global consumerism.<sup>27</sup> Most analysts trace the growing visibility of this 'new middle class' to the global shift from older ideologies of a state-managed economy, to a consumer based, neo-liberal market economy. While critics condemn this class for excessive consumerism, more positive evaluations portray it as the vanguard of economic and political liberalisation. What seems uncontested is that the new middle classes have been the main beneficiaries of the expanding global consumer economy during the recent decades, as well as the main proponents of neoliberal urban restructuring.

There is now a wide literature on the formation and growth of this new middle class in different countries, including Turkey<sup>28</sup>. It is not possible for me to delve into this literature within the confines of this thesis. What is important to emphasise for my own purposes here, is the link between the rise of new middle classes and broader discourses of cosmopolitanism.

The upper segments of what is referred to as 'new middle classes', are composed of manager-professionals in the new service sectors of the global economy, most notably

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<sup>27</sup> For an in-depth discussion of 'new middle classes' in contemporary India, see : Leela Fernandes (2006) . *India's New Middle Class*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis London

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on the 'new middle classes' in Turkey see for example: Henry J. Rutz & Erol Balkan (2009) . *Reproducing Class*. Berghahn Books, on the production and reproduction of 'new middle classes' in Istanbul through the Selective Middle School Examination that is a part of the education system in Turkey.

finance and insurance, information technologies, marketing and advertising, fashion and design, or tourism. Richard Florida (2005) has coined the term 'creative classes' to refer to these managerial-professional groups and emphasises their role in the gentrification process. Their cosmopolitan lifestyle has become the aspiration for more 'local' middle strata of Istanbul.<sup>29</sup>

In the context of Istanbul, it is the proliferation of gated communities and shopping malls that are the most visible identifiers of this new consumer economy. But also non-material markers of a cosmopolitan lifestyle are becoming increasingly important for the self-identification of the city's new middle classes. The private museums and their transnational exhibition programs are examples of such markers.

The imagination of a cosmopolitan way of life becomes conceivable through the consumption of such cultural symbols. The Rembrandt exhibition, as I emphasised earlier, may be considered an example of how such symbols become associated with museum visits. As the quotation by İpek Yeşildağ below reveals, such symbols embrace not only material goods, but also a lifestyle that centres on the appreciation of art:

*[I]t is a great chance [that] you don't have to go to Amsterdam to see a Rembrandt. We just bring those paintings here so that people can see [them] in their country without travelling abroad. [...] Because not everybody can afford to travel and see those exhibitions and paintings.*

*İpek Yeşildağ, Sakip Sabancı Museum, 25.04.2012*

A museum conception that revolves around lifestyle is in turn accompanied by restaurants and souvenir shops which extend the symbolic capital to other forms of consumption in or associated with the museum.

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<sup>29</sup> I have deliberately avoided the problem of the limits of what constitutes the middle-class, given the ambiguities of its boundaries. For a detailed discussion see: Loic Wacquant (1991) . Making Class: The Middle Class(es) in Social Theory and Social Structure. In Scott McNall, Rhonda Levine, and Rick Fantasia (eds.) *Bringing Class Back Contemporary and Historical Perspectives*. Boulder, Colo.:Westview Press.

To come back to my initial point, what is described and exhibited as Istanbul's cosmopolitan culture, is built upon the imaginary of a culturally diverse city, but one which conforms to middle-class aesthetics. Thus, different cultural influences which have shaped the city over the millennia, and the 'multiculturalism' of its ancient heritage are displayed as assets to mark an open and transnational metropolis. At the same time, lifestyles which do not fit the prestigious, middle-class aesthetic are moved out of direct sight. This is exemplified by the gentrification projects of Sulukule in 2009-2011 and the ongoing gentrification of Tarlabaşı, two districts in Istanbul with large Roma and Kurdish populations. The city creates itself as an exhibition space which can no longer accommodate disadvantaged inhabitants who do not fit into this aesthetic. Such projects have driven large segments of the population from the city centre out to the fringes of Istanbul.

The cosmopolitan imaginary of Istanbul's new middle classes has thus given impetus to renovation projects which have been highly exclusionary for the majority of the city's population. Hamnett and Shoval (2003:386) point out that this is a broader phenomenon which involves "[...] strategic use of diversity for competitive advantage in the global marketplace." In the context of neoliberal urban policies, this enhances the capacity of the private sector to shape political and economic priorities. At the same time, it legitimises ongoing changes.

Resuming my earlier discussion on the role of museums in this process, I wish to emphasise a particular paradox. Bennett (2006) has argued that, in contrast to national museums of previous eras, the contemporary museum is a space which fosters pluralism and in this sense creates an aesthetic that is emancipatory. There is little question that museums and galleries in Istanbul embrace a more cosmopolitan aesthetic than national museums. But it is also very important to keep in mind, that the kinds of plurality they promote are ones which conform to the new middle-class canons of aesthetics. Thus, certain kinds of plurality are approved and others are censored. So it is possible to argue along with Eagleton that these aesthetics "insert social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates, and operat[e] as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony" (Eagleton 1990:28).

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

As I have discussed in this thesis, the art field in Istanbul today is a contested terrain in which different institutions and actors compete in formulating the content and meaning of what constitutes culture. Over the past two decades, an assemblage of actors and institutions has entered the art scene not only as producers and consumers of culture, but also as makers of what might be termed cultural policy. These actors consist of both governmental and municipal actors, as well as corporations and their cultural foundations. What I have aimed to point out in particular, is that the parameters of governance have been redefined by this assemblage, because the municipality behaves as if it were a semi-autonomous actor, in that it both supports and competes with the corporate actors in the art field.

As I have illustrated, the formulation of cultural policy by an assemblage of actors allows discussions of different aspects, such as cultural diplomacy, cultural sponsorship and promotion, as well as cultural urban development to occupy equal and interlinked positions in the discourse of culture. Sponsors for example, are concerned with the prestige gain that cultural engagement endows on their company, while the government has an interest in the opportunities that the exhibition exchanges have on the promotion of Turkey and the city of Istanbul. These engagements with and through culture reflect the actors' multiple interests in the field of cultural policy-making. Rather than in a system of government-centred policy-making, an assemblage allows for a parallel and equal engagement by various actors. Yet, because of the docility of the term 'cultural policy' the actors' divergent claims upon culture can be easily accommodated. This leads

to coalitions in projects to achieve short-term mutual benefits which, as I have shown, are consequently profoundly reshaping the parameters of the art market.

This restyling of the art market has brought particularly well-connected actors into positions of substantial power as intermediaries between the Istanbul art world and the transnational scene. Following the 1980s coup in Turkey, public confidence in national actors operating as mediators for artists plummeted drastically, leaving young curators who had been educated overseas in the position to gain the Turkish artists' trust. Curators and directors of the Istanbul art world today play a significant role in creating links to the transnational art world and hence in promoting Istanbul. These actors manage to accumulate considerable power through their position as key nodes between the corporate stakeholders, municipal entrepreneurs and transnational actors.

The symbolic capital invested in the art world has led corporate actors to embrace 'art' as a symbol of global stature. Hence, major corporations have begun investing in cultural activities which have resulted in 'culture' becoming a very significant dimension of corporate public relations. As I have discussed, transnational corporations rely on a metropolitan culture. The attraction of the 'creative classes' as a defining feature of economic life requires a cultural environment and cosmopolitan lifestyle in the cities. Museums play a decisive role as cultural anchors. This pivotal position of cultural institutions within city development and economic life has led to a close intertwining of cultural institutions and corporate sponsorship.

The engagement in the visual arts imparts branding opportunities to the city of Istanbul as a cultural hub, while simultaneously creating tremendous visibility for the corporate sponsors of the museums and exhibitions which are advertised throughout the city. The discourse of culture enables an assemblage of actors with potentially different goals to engage in coalitions of interests. In contrast to the common conviction that state and corporate interests cannot meet easily, the art world of Istanbul is an example of how the conventional binary opposition of public/private is not tenable.

'Blockbuster exhibitions', as I discussed, have created a transnational form of circulation that corporate actors are particularly in favour of sponsoring. These exhibitions show that attendance-driven exhibition design has become crucial as an exhibition style where corporate image building is at stake. My aim has also been to highlight the significance

of 'blockbuster exhibitions' in the cultivation of 'new publics' in the metropolitan arena. The formation of these publics is boosted particularly through the transformation of the institution from an elite space to the accommodation of 'urban art spectacles'. An entire package of events ranging from cinema screenings to live concerts, with high-class restaurants and cafes thrown in, furthermore allows the visitors to 'consume' much more than just art right on the premises, as well as through merchandise even outside the museum's walls. This transformation of the elite art space into an integral part of a new urban event culture is becoming a trendy space which appeals to the new middle classes and in which they want to participate. In the context of Istanbul, the accessibility of transnational exhibitions in the city is crucial for the 'new middle classes' because it allows their participation in an imagined cosmopolitan culture that extends beyond Turkey.

The framing of this thesis has had several constraining yet fruitful difficulties. It is a thesis that aims to look at a process that is by its very nature in flux. My aim has been to shed light on the influence exerted by the circulation of such exhibitions on the art market, and yet I was able only to look into the processes taking place from one point in this circulation. Istanbul as a point of departure, a specific cultural setting, and yet one node in a network of many established or newly emerging cosmopolitan art centres was of necessity at the same time example and backdrop for a system in flux. In this thesis, I have looked at cases from the Istanbul museum scene that are specific to the creation of its cultural landscape, but yet show how the cultural policy – or lack thereof - in Istanbul is characteristic for a wide range of metropolises, be it Berlin, Istanbul, London or New York.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1: A selection of Museums and Galleries in Istanbul

#### **The Istanbul Museum of Modern Art**

The Istanbul Museum of Modern Art was opened in 2004 as a project initiated by Oya Eczacıbaşı<sup>30</sup> to extend the exhibition of contemporary and modern art from the Biennial to a permanent space. It occupies a former cargo warehouse on the pier in Karaköy built in the 1950s, which was converted into the current space from 2003 onwards.

The permanent collection is the Eczacıbaşı's family collection, a collection of modern Turkish art, which is being shown on the upper floor. The ground floor is reserved for temporary exhibitions of Turkish and international artists, mainly in the areas of design, architecture, photography and video as well as contemporary art. The museum is funded by the Eczacıbaşı Group, a Turkish industrial corporation founded by the Eczacıbaşı family, which provided the initial investment as well as the core collection of paintings. In its mission statement, it describes itself as a museum that collects for the public and shares and promotes art on a transnational plain:

As part of its commitment to sharing Turkey's artistic creativity with wide audiences and promoting its cultural identity on the international art scene, the İstanbul Museum of Modern Art hosts a number of interdisciplinary activities.

The Museum embraces a global vision to collect, document, preserve and exhibit creative works of modern and contemporary art and make them accessible to art lovers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Oya Eczacıbaşı is a Turkish curator and wife to Bülent Eczacıbaşı , the son of entrepreneur Nejat Eczacıbaşı.

The museum shows around 4 exhibitions per year, of which two are international exhibitions and one is a retrospective of a Turkish artist who has often not been shown in Turkey before. The Istanbul Modern also engages in education programs aiming to educate a new public.

### **Sakıp Sabancı Museum**

The building in Emirgan, a neighbourhood on the Bosphorus, was constructed in 1927 and has been in the ownership of the Sabancı-family since 1950. Serving originally as a private home for the family, it was transferred to the Sabancı University in the late 1990s and transformed into a museum by 2002. The mansion was complemented by extensions in the early 2000s; both structures combined now house the permanent collections, i.e. calligraphy, archaeological artefacts as well as furniture and decorative arts, and temporary exhibitions, ranging from historical artefacts to modern and contemporary art. (Sakıp Sabancı Museum's website; Sabancı Holding Annual Report, 2009: pp. 58-60)

The museum shows two large exhibitions from abroad every year. In 2005, the Sakıp Sabancı museum showed the first large exhibition of European modern art with their "Picasso in Istanbul" exhibition that quickly became a must-see event in the city. The museum has since hosted a large number of blockbuster exhibitions ranging from Rodin, Dali, and Beuys to the recent exhibition of Rembrandt and his contemporaries.

### **Pera Museum**

Opened in 2005 by İnan and Suna Kıraç, the Pera Museum hosts rotating collections on two floors, as well as a permanent collection of Orientalist paintings and Anatolian weights and measures. The museum is situated in the Pera/Tebebaşı neighbourhood of Beyoğlu, in the building of the former Bristol Hotel, dating back to the 1890s.

Both, the Pera Museum and the Istanbul Research Institute located in another building of the same era in Tebebaşı, were initiated and are being sponsored by the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation. (Suna Kıraç, formerly Suna Koç, is a member of the board of directors of the Koç Holding).

The focus of the permanent exhibitions on the first two floors is on historical and archaeological artefacts (measures and weights, tiles and ceramics) and Orientalist paintings from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in the ownership of the Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation. The last two floors are dedicated to regularly changing (sometimes blockbuster) exhibitions, primarily of

international modern artists but also incorporating selections from arts academy graduation classes. Some of the most important collections to be hosted by the Pera museum have been exhibitions of Miro, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, as well as Akira Kurosawa.

The museum is further planning to expand its space with plans to erect an auditorium, a library, as well as screening room complexes. However, the museum has been waiting for planning permission from the Istanbul municipality for construction on a lot that is currently occupied by the state television channel TRT. The plans for the cultural centre have been drawn up by Frank Gehry.

### **SALT Beyoğlu and SALT Galata**

Vasıf Kortun in collaboration with Garanti Bankası opened SALT Beyoğlu and SALT Galata in 2011. The project includes spaces for research and experimental thinking and comprises about 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition and program space, as well as extensive archives on Turkish contemporary and modern art. Vasıf Kortun has further curated and directed many international exhibitions and biennials.

## **Appendix 2: Interview Partners**

### **Ali Artun**

Ali Artun was trained as an architect, but has been working in the art world since the early 80s. He founded Galeri Nev in 1984 and has been active as an art critic and lecturer. He is the author of several books of a series on the Turkish art scene and works as a lecturer of History of Art at Istanbul Technical University.

(Date of interview: 02.05.2012)

### **Çelenk Bafra**

Çelenk Bafra started her career in the arts as a coordinator and later director of the Istanbul Biennial from 2004 to 2008 at İKSV. She then worked in Paris for the “Saison de la Turquie en France” as the artistic director of the visual arts section, an exhibition series of Turkish art in France organised by İKSV. She has worked on a plethora of different projects both in and outside of Turkey that have allowed her to gain both professional experience and form strong connections with international networks. For the last year she has been working as a curator for the Istanbul Modern.

(Date of interview: 27.03.2012)

### **Charlotte Bulte**

Charlotte Bulte was the Incoming Exhibitions Manager for the Sakip Sabancı Museum. Bulte worked as a coordinator for the “Saison de la Turquie en France”, an exhibition series of Turkish art in France organised by İKSV. Since our interview, she has left the Sakip Sabancı Museum to start a Masters program in History of Art in the UK.

(Date of interview: 25.04.2012)

### **Demet Yıldız**

Demet Yıldız is the project coordinator for the Istanbul Biennial at the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and the Arts. Yıldız has worked for the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts since 2009. She holds a Masters Degree in Cultural Studies from Sabancı University.

(Date of Interview: 29.05.2012)

**Hüma Arslaner**

Hüma Arslaner is the Paintings, Contemporary and Collection of Decorative Art Manager at Sakip Sabancı Museum. Arslaner has been in charge of transnational exhibitions at the Sakip Sabancı Museum since 2006 and was responsible for the “Picasso in Istanbul” exhibition, the first blockbuster exhibition that was shown in Turkey in 2006.

(Date of Interview: 25.04.2012)

**İpek Yeşildağ**

İpek Yeşildağ is the Communications and Public Relations Specialist at Sakip Sabancı Museum. She has worked in this position since 2011.

(Date of Interview 25.04.2012)

**Özalp Birol**

Özalp Birol is the general manager of the Pera Museum and the Istanbul Research Institute of the İnan and Suna Kıraç foundation. Previously Özalp Birol used to work as a director for the culture and arts programs of Yapı Kredi Bankası.

(Date of Interview: 07.06.2012)

**Özlem Ece**

Özlem Ece is responsible for Cultural Policy Development and Social Responsibility Projects at the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts. Ece works particularly on seeking dialogue between different actors in the culture and arts sector in an attempt to formulate policy and make policy suggestions for the government.

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**Vasıf Kortun**

Vasıf Kortun, the former director and initiator of Proje4L and Platform Garanti and current director of SALT, is one of the central actors in the Istanbul art world. In 1998, Kortun returned from directing Bard College’s Museum of the Center for Curatorial Studies in New York and opened an

art space which he called the Istanbul Contemporary Art Project. He founded both Proje4L and Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center in 2001, two exhibition spaces that created an international network of artists that met up and connected in Istanbul. These spaces allowed transnational connections between artists and curators to be sustained beyond the Istanbul Biennial. Platform Garanti also organised an international residency program for young artists that created a strong connection between young artists from around the world and the city of Istanbul. Platform Garanti closed in 2007, and Vasıf Kortun in collaboration with Garanti Bankası opened SALT Beyoğlu and SALT Galata in 2011. The project includes spaces for research and experimental thinking and comprises about 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition and program space, as well as extensive archives on Turkish contemporary and modern art. Vasıf Kortun has further curated and directed many international exhibitions and biennials.

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