

Sculptures of the Town

Skulptor Elbruz Denge

I'm pleased to welcome you to the third and final *Symposium* of our Revisibility: Datça Aphrodite Project.

The genesis of our project can be traced back to the Aphrodite of Knidos. The objective is to facilitate the *revisibility* of the values that women have established and continue to establish by sculpting the Aphrodite of Datça. It is also important to note that the values of Datça and Knidos, which are *invisible*, are also included in the process of making them visible again.

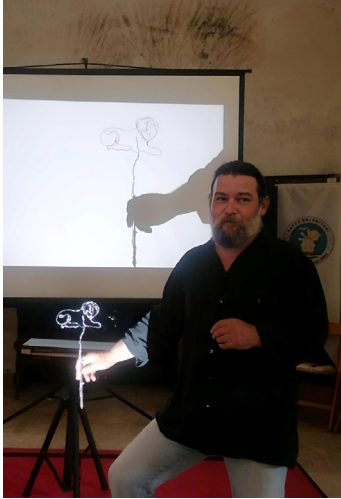
The first event was devoted to my sculpture, entitled *The ubiquity of Aphrodite*. A 20 cm marble sculpture of Aphrodite was dispatched to SpaceX with the hope that it would be delivered to Mars. The intention was to claim that the human colonisation of Mars would not be possible without the presence of love, which could be represented by Aphrodite.

Subsequently, the *Symposia Dadia* sub-project was initiated. We are now gathered at the third Symposium. The first *Symposium* focused on the Knidos excavations and research, while the second *Symposium* addressed the cult of Aphrodite. The focus of our discussion today is the Knidos Aphrodite statue. *Symposia Dadia* is ending. However, a series of other surprise events is scheduled during our *Revisibility* Project.



The ubiquity of Aphrodite,
2024, Foto: Cem Bal

Prior to my work on the statue of *Aphrodite of Datça*, I had created a number of sculptures in our town. If I may, I would like to provide some background on these sculptures. Finally, I will complete my speech with the *Aphrodite of Datça*.



The first sculpture is the Lion of Datça. As you are aware, the original of this sculpture, the Lion of Knidos, is currently on display at the British Museum. Erol Karakullukçu, the mayor of the relevant period, requested that I produce this sculpture. At the time, I was still in the early stages of developing my sculpting abilities. I yielded myself to the sculpture, but I had just begun to explore America. Despite my shortcomings, I accepted the offer without hesitation.

The original sculpture is a three-metre-by-two-metre marble piece. The sculpture exhibits three broken paws. With the exception of the rear left paw. This was the first challenge. The question was whether the statue should be made with claws or whether the fractures should be reflected. Another challenge was that the hollow eyes had a dramatic look. The eyes exhibited a longing and soulful quality. In the past, phosphorescent shells were placed within the eye sockets to create a glowing effect, and the statue served as a lighthouse in Aslanlı Burun. As previously stated, the most significant aspect for me was the intense gaze: Intense gaze with hollow eyes and dark shadows but without phosphorescent shells. In accordance with these aesthetic considerations, its mane should also be fluffy, fitting these intense gazes. The lion should be softer, even a bit chubby. Cute. It should only have claws on its back left paw, for self-protection. This portrait suited my life philosophy.

A workshop was not available to me at the time. I located the designated area in the municipal vehicle depot, conveniently

situated in close proximity to the air compressor. I was planning on creating the sculpture there. The area in which I was situated was open and accessible to numerous employees of the municipality, who gathered and dispersed there at various times throughout the day. Including the night shift, I was consistently surrounded by a multitude of individuals. Naturally, there was a great deal of interest among the general public in what I was doing and a desire to be informed. They wished me 'good luck' or 'easy ending' without stopping. In Turkey, you always wish that a job will *end easily* when you meet someone who is working. This is normal. But, for me it was not *easy*. I sought the assistance of Mayor Erol in requesting that workers conduct themselves in such a way that I was afforded the privacy I needed in my work: The workers should please pretend I'm not there. The Mayor conveyed my sensitivity to the labour supervisors. However, the situation remained unchanged. Consequently, the Mayor warned that an official record would be forthcoming. However, the locals considered sincere curiosity to be an exercise of personal freedom; they were not deterred from being recorded. I had accepted that I could not persuade them, when a solution came to my mind in a daydream. Based on the principle that nothing stays between two people in Datça, I immediately proceeded to the friends at the repair workshop. I requested a cup of tea. Then I said to them, "Do you know what sculpting is like? It is like making love. If someone wishes you good luck or an easy end for the work while you are in bed with your beloved, what do you feel in that situation, I feel the same when I am sculpting". My concentration problem was solved at the root. At the end of a year's work, I completed this naive sculpture and placed it in the green area in front of the Datça Amphitheatre. While making this sculpture, I had the opportunity to question many things about sculpture.



Lion of Datça, 2006

The children were profoundly interested in this statue. They frequently played on top of it and appeared to derive great pleasure from it. According to a friend of mine, his young daughter would visit the statue on a daily basis. When the weather was cold, she would cover the *Lion* with a blanket to protect him from the elements. Over time, generations will continue to grow up with this statue. The *Lion of Datça* sculpture has established for itself a unique presence in the space.

The Sculpture of the *Lion of Datça* became the first statue of our town after centuries. It is my first sculpture too.

Subsequently, I proceeded to carve the *Snail* sculpture. A snail can live to be over 20 years old and is an animal with magical movement. This has a profound effect on me. Additionally, the snail is the emblem of Datça's celebrated motto,



Snail, 2009

“If you are in a hurry, what are you doing in Datça?” The slowness of the snail comes to me as wisdom. Furthermore, the snail has become a culinary feature of some of the local population. Furthermore, the slowness of the snail is well-suited to the pace of life in this area. The ‘snail’s gaze’ enabled me to perceive the congested and dynamic life of our town. Its longevity and its wise appearance continue to impress me.

Actually, I had imagined two snails. One would run after the other, trying to catch up as it stretched forward. The one in front would turn to look at it. I couldn’t get the one to run. The snail, which is trying to look back, is still trying to see it today. If I could have made both snails, their stories would have been more vivid. Anyway!

The *Snail* too is our town’s sculpture.

I placed the sculptures of *Two Almonds* next to the snail. The almond is closely associated with Datça. To make a sculpture of it

would have been clichéd. But when the two sculptures were placed next to each other, they resembled a heart, which also moved me. Still, I was undecided. Until I came across this poem by Mevlana:

*Two eyes, two almonds
One is yours
One is mine*

This poem convinced me. So I placed these *Two almonds* at the Jandarma crossroads at the entrance to Datça.

At some point in the future, I would like to make two almonds and place one on the island of Symi and one in Datça.

The *Two almonds* sculpture is the town's sculpture as well.

Subsequently, I proceeded to carve the statue of Demeter. The Demeter of Knidos represents the second most significant symbol of Datça. The original of this work is also housed in the British Museum. The significance of Demeter's meaning was particularly pronounced among farmer women. The original is a highly elegant sculpture. Bad things happened to the people when Demeter withheld her sacred blessing over the fields and nature to find her daughter. Demeter was of paramount importance to Knidos and is similarly significant for Datça. It is one of the most accomplished sculptures



Two almonds, 2009



Demeter of Datça, 2010

of women. In fact, for me, the statue that best encapsulates the essence of women is the Aphrodite of Knidos. Do not let Demeter overhear this, let it remain our little secret.

I had to carve *Demeter of Datça* during a pretty complicated period of my life. When I had to fit the order around my personal chaos, the compression of the time of the order has been added. I had to say “Finished” before I could do justice to her. The sculpture is in Datça harbour, still looking at the statue of the *Lion of Datça*.

Demeter of Datça is a sculpture of the town.



The seal Badem, 2012

Then I carved a sculpture of a seal we named *Badem*. *Badem*, who spent a significant amount of time on the shores of Datça, added many delightful stories to our lives. She became one of the unforgettable characters of Datça because of her playing with dogs on the beaches

and people in the sea. In my opinion, animals that got too close to people carried a life risk. We were very concerned about *Badem*. She disappeared for a while and we could not even hear from her. *Badem* is currently under the care of the Akdeniz Koruma Derneği (Mediterranean Conservation Association). I learnt she is on the Greek coast now. When I sculpted her, I imagined that she was a mother searching for her child. It was significant that, where she currently stands, her neighbour *Demeter of Datça* is also a mother awaiting the return of her daughter *Persephone*.

The seal *Badem*, in Datça Harbour, is our town’s sculpture.

In the direction of the city centre, the bus terminal is located on the left. The sculpture known as the *Evil Eye Stone* is situated in front of the park. I collaborated with the park’s design. I began by portraying the “evil eye” as a gaze. However, the park’s design

was not completed due to a lack of funding. If I had been able to complete it, I would have constructed stone mesh walls and created bumps. I wanted to carve the mounds inwards, animal eyes watching us from underground. These eyes would not be a cause for fear; it is these animals that are afraid of us. They would be watching the passing crowds of people from their hiding places with this anxiety.



The Evil Eye Stone, 2013

The Evil Eye Stone, a mathematical sculpture, is the town's sculpture.

The other sculpture is the giant *Chameleon* sculpture in the Reşadiye neighbourhood. I designed it for the garden of a housing estate. The sculpture offers a metaphorical counsel to those who visit Datça from outside the region: "When you come here, adapt like a chameleon, even if it's only for a moment".



The Chameleon, 2014,
Photo: Aslı Karadağlı

During the process of creating the sculpture, I also sought to conduct an adaptation test. I posed the sculpture in an appropriate location within the grounds of the site. I cut a section of the stone wall at right and left angles to the road and I created a recess towards the housing estate garden. I curved the right and left walls of the recess into the garden in a manner analogous to the tail of a chameleon, with the height being reduced. A distance of approximately five to six metres separated the two

tails. On the roadside, there was approximately ten metres of unobstructed space. Both distances were deemed suitable for the construction of a gate. The compatibility test was as follows: If the gate were constructed in the narrow opening of the pocket that I constructed, which decreased in height and opened into the housing estate garden, the residents of the housing estate would share the sculpture with Reşadiye. Consequently, both the chameleon would be at liberty and would convey the message of harmony to the neighbourhood. This was the optimal aesthetic solution. Conversely, if the residents opted for the longer opening and constructed a gate there, they would have both confined the chameleon and conveyed a lack of desire to foster harmony with the neighbourhood. Furthermore, this would not be an aesthetically pleasing solution, as the straight, high walls would continue in a straight line. I left the decision to the residents, who made their choice without undue delay. The residents, having made a relatively mediocre choice, proceeded to construct a ten-metre-long iron gate in order to continue the straight wall.

Despite the terrible gate, *Chameleon* is the sculpture of our town.

Then the Gezi Park incidents happened. The ground was shaken in Turkey. I wanted to make a memorial sculpture for Berkin Elvan, who passed away. Through this Datça stone I wrote about our tear-filled eyes, our torn hearts, the bread we could not buy. I carved one of the impressive mottoes of the Gezi movement



Berkin Elvan, 2014

on the stone: *Keep quiet when children are sleeping, not when they are dying.*

The memorial sculpture to *Berkin Elvan* is a sculpture of the town.

I would like to open a parenthesis here to highlight an important point. I chose the angle and location where I had originally placed Berkin Elvan's monument so

that it would complement the sculpture itself and thus enhance its meaning. The relationship between a sculpture and its surrounding environment should complete the poem of the sculpture. It is also important to consider the sculptor's opinion when landscaping the environment.

A statue is not simply an object. It is essential that a sculpture be situated in a location that is both aesthetically pleasing and comfortable for the viewer. Furthermore, if the city square sculptures are placed incorrectly, the sculptures will be uncomfortable because they will be unable to establish a relationship with their surroundings. Instead of adding value, they cause a loss in value.

In particular, municipalities frequently receive a considerable number of sculptural works as a result of their involvement in sculpture symposiums. The issue of where to place them in the city presents a number of challenges that require careful consideration. It is my contention that Datça, which is fortunate in terms of sculpture, should take some steps in this regard. Furthermore, I reiterate my suggestion for a sculpture park.

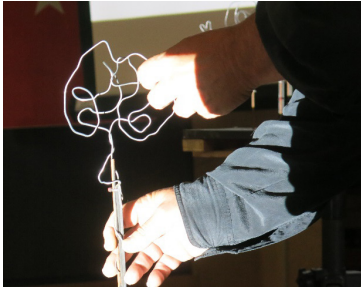
Let us close the parenthesis and continue with our sculptures of the town.

The time had come to carve out the sculptures of *Dogs without tails*. Since my arrival in Datça, I have observed that the animals of Datça are afforded the same freedoms as the people of Datça. All living creatures are permitted to live freely in this geographical area.



Dogs without tails, 2015

With the advent of mobile phones, which quickly found their way into Datça, our perception has changed. I began to question the veracity of our two-dimensional images and the way our perception works. The concept of abstract figures developed from there. Two-dimensional images of dogs. I created them by removing all protrusions



and tails from the shapes. By introducing a 'gaze', however, the figures were given depth.

Two of these sculptures are located in Eski Datça: *Dogs without tails* are the sculptures of the town.

Another sculpture was created at the entrance to the Datça Industrial Estate. My workshop is very close to the industrial estate. Ever since I moved to the area, I have been thinking about a sculpture for the craftsmen of the industry. One day, when I came across a mass of rebar coming out of a demolished structure, I dreamed of an *Industry Tree* and created it.

I met the master craftsmen in the industry estate one by one. I asked each of them for a hand tool they used and to write their names in their own handwriting on a piece of paper. Then I made a tree trunk out of iron, engraved the names of the masters on the hand tools and hung them like fruits on the rebar, which I considered to be the crown of the tree. More than a hundred craftsmen came together in a single tree. I placed the fruits at the bottom of the tree, representing the departed ones. I was amazed to realise that the sum of the professional lives of the craftsmen on it was more than two thousand years! I was really quite taken aback by this! I said: "This is the age of the tree".



Industry Tree, 2021

While I was making the *Industry tree* a big forest fire broke out in our region, including Datça. We could not put out the fire for days. So I changed the colour of the trunk of the tree to burgundy. On the top of the tree I engraved the silhouette of the characteristic hill we call Reis Kafası (chief's head). When the birds landed on the top of this rebar mass and started chirping, I said, "Ha, that is it!". They were coming to the *Industry tree*, not the real coniferous tree next to it.

The sculpture of the *Industry tree* is the sculpture of our town.

Another work of mine is the monumental sculpture of *Praxis of Ideas*, which was dedicated in memory of Professor Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, one of our Culture Ministers. My intention was to portray the capacity to express political ideas freely, which frequently results in violence and conflict in the streets, as exemplified by Kışlalı's lectures. The three marble columns represent Kışlalı's students. They are speaking at the same time, but this is approximately how we are. A hemispherical marble is situated in the centre, with a layer of accumulated, crystallised ideas represented by crystallised subterranean water. This symbolises the crystallisation of accumulated ideas. I positioned a hemispherical mirror at the centre of this crystal surface. It allows us to observe the current traffic patterns in the vicinity. The spherical shape of the mirror enables it to gather the surrounding environment and reflect it back onto itself. This includes viewers, and also birds, leaves... However, in its reflection, real-life undergoes global distortion. The statue has a fourth empty place that remains empty. The person who comes there is the fourth side. In this way, he/she becomes a part of the sculpture both as listeners and as reflected in the mirror. Ahmet Taner Kışlalı passed away due to a tragic attack. I have tried to express the possibilities that Ahmet Taner Kışlalı wanted to give us. Namely, "to be open to those who



Praxis of Ideas, 2021

express their ideas and set them free”; in short, the praxis of Ideas.

Praxis of Ideas is a sculpture of the town.

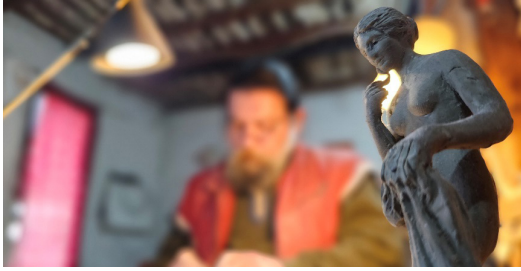
My intention is to create a new statue of Aphrodite for our town, which has been missing for centuries. Additionally, the statue will serve as a representation of the town. The Lion of Knidos, the Demeter of Knidos and the Aphrodite of Knidos represent three significant symbols of Datça for me. In the harbour, the *Demeter of Datça* is oriented towards the Lion of Datça, which is attempting to discern the location of Aphrodite. Aphrodite will be depicted as thoughtful, with her gaze directed towards the ground but nowhere.

Of the three symbols mentioned, the Aphrodite of Knidos is the most significant. She is never forgotten. I guess this is like artistic magic. And, the question remains: will we forget her? Whether I create the “Aphrodite of Datça” or not, we will not forget her! Indeed, the Aphrodite of Knidos is still the only immortal among the gods and goddesses of Olympus. This is due to the fact that she represents the concept of love. Love cannot be forgotten.

I have not forgotten her either. It remains a concern of mine long after *Demeter* and *the Lion of Datça*. Because she is the statue of love. I was not going to address it in a subdued manner and relegate it to its proper place. This is why the *Revisibility Project* was born. *Symposia Dadia*, even a film script, a sculpture exhibition were born too out of this necessity and furthermore, it is uncertain what other events may transpire in our lives. In my understanding Aphrodite is equal to *infinity plus one*.

It is a matter of record that I have never reduced Aphrodite to the figure of a naked woman. It is difficult to articulate the impact she has on me, it is very difficult. I'm on my way to an adventure that I can't finish by telling you. While I am driven to achieve the statue, I am also consumed by a burning curiosity. There is a wealth of information to be shared regarding Aphrodite. It may be necessary to present a comprehensive account of the female experience, encompassing the full spectrum of love and life. This is an impossible multitude.

Aphrodite of Datça will be a thinking woman. I said that about *The ubiquity of Aphrodite* sculpture. Why is she thinking? What is she thinking about? How is she thinking? I have many answers to these questions. But I know they are all inadequate. I want women to tell them to me, to us, to the present and to the future.



The modeling of 'The ubiquity of Aphrodite', 2023, Photo: Cem Bal

When I see women's efforts to create life, their struggles for existence, how they make life permanent and sustainable, in fact their invisible values, I say that this millennium will be the millennium of women. I expect the statue of Aphrodite of Datça to contribute to this process.

Thanks for your attention.