

***İbretnüma* (2009) in the context of shadow play representation language with a feminist approach**

Berceste Gülçin Özdemir | Associate professor | İstanbul University, İstanbul, Turkey | glnzdmr.777@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3742-2739>
Corresponding author

Nilay Ulusoy | Professor | Bahçeşehir University, İstanbul, Turkey
nilay.ulusoy@comm.bau.edu.tr | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2176-7003>

Citation

Özdemir, B. G. & Ulusoy, N. (2024). *İbretnüma* (2009) in the context of shadow play representation language with a feminist approach. ARTS, Special issue on contemporary art, 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.46372/arts.1520946>

Submission: 23.07.2024 | Acceptance: 10.11.2024

Abstract

Istanbul-born visual artist and activist Canan Şenol, also known as Canan (1970-), produced the video animation *İbretnüma* (2009), which tells the story of a young girl who moves from an Anatolian village to a big city. Using a contemporary art approach, the work incorporates representations that influence traditional Turkish art. The video animation features a diverse range of visuals, including traditional Turkish shadow play, largely derived from original artifacts and combined with collage elements, to represent the female body in all its aspects. By subverting patriarchal ideologies and the non-verbal restrictions imposed on women during Turkey's modernization process, the work synthesizes avant-garde and feminist approaches in its representation techniques, blending traditional and contemporary art forms. This allows for an examination of the female character's position in both public and private spheres, informed by feminist film theory and the concepts explored in the work.

Keywords

video-animation, turkish shadow play, female body, feminist activism, turkey contemporary art

Highlights

- The video animation *İbretnüma* (2009) presents a feminist perspective on contemporary art as a work created by combining traditional art forms with contemporary art forms.
- While Karagöz, another name of which is dream play as well as shadow play, offers an unreal world to its audience, Canan shows the transformation of traditional art forms with a contemporary understanding of art he brings to shadow play.
- In terms of the representation of the female character, *İbretnüma* breaks the male-dominated mechanism of the pleasurable gaze through the presentation of the female body and the narrator's voice as a woman, while subverting voyeristic and fetishistic pleasure.

Gölge oyunu temsil dili bağlamında feminist bir yaklaşımla *İbretnüma* (2009)

Berçeste Gülçin Özdemir | Doçent doktor | İstanbul Üniversitesi, İstanbul, Türkiye | glcnzdmr.777@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3742-2739>
Sorumlu yazar

Nilay Ulusoy | Profesör doktor | Bahçeşehir Üniversitesi, İstanbul, Türkiye
nilay.ulusoy@comm.bau.edu.tr | <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2176-7003>

Atıf

Özdemir, B. G. ve Ulusoy, N. (2024). Gölge oyunu temsil dili bağlamında feminist bir yaklaşımla *İbretnüma* (2009). ARTS, Çağdaş sanat özel sayısı, 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.46372/arts.1520946>

Geliş: 23.07.2024 | Kabul: 10.11.2024

Öz

İstanbul doğumlu, görsel sanatçı ve aktivist Canan Şenol – Canan (1970-), Anadolu'nun bir köyünden büyük bir şehre taşınan genç bir kızın hikâyesini anlatan *İbretnüma* (2009) adlı video animasyonu, geleneksel Türkiye sanatına etki eden temsillerden yararlanarak çağdaş sanat anlayışıyla üretmiştir. Video-animasyon kadın bedeninin her yönden temsilini göstermek için, büyük ölçüde orijinal eserlerden alınan ve kolaj unsurlarıyla birleştirilen geleneksel Türk gölge oyununu içeren çeşitli bir görsel yelpazeye sahiptir. Türkiye'nin modernleşme sürecinde kadınlara dayatılan ataerkil ideolojileri ve sözel olmayan kısıtlamaları yıkarak, temsil tekniğinde avangart ve feminist yaklaşımı sentezleyen eser, geleneksel sanat formlarını, çağdaş sanat formları içinde kullanarak kadın karakterin kamusal ve özel alandaki konumunu hem feminist film teorisyenlerinin düşünceleri bağlamında hem de eserde kullanılan kavramlar odağında incelenmesine izin vermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler

video-animasyon, türk gölge oyunu, kadın bedeni, feminist aktivizm, türkiye çağdaş sanatı

Öne çıkanlar

- İbretnüma* (2009) adlı video animasyon, geleneksel sanat formlarıyla, çağdaş sanat formlarının bir araya getirilmesiyle oluşturulan bir eser olarak çağdaş sanat anlayışına feminist bir perspektif sunmaktadır.
- Gölge oyununun yanı sıra bir başka adı da rüya oyunu olan Karagöz, seyircisine gerçek dışı bir dünya sunarken Canan, gölge oyununa getirdiği çağdaş bir sanat anlayışıyla geleneksel sanat formlarının dönüşümünü göstermektedir.
- İbretnüma* kadın karakterin temsili açısından erkek egemen haz dolu bakış mekanizmasını kadın bedeninin sunumuyla ve anlatıcı sesin kadın oluşuyla kırarken voyeristik ve fetişistik hazzı alaşağı etmektedir.

Introduction¹

Canan is an artist who describes herself as a feminist activist. She has been recognized as a strong representative of the slogan “the personal is political” in the Turkish art scene since the 1990s (Altındere & Evren, 2014, p. 5). Known for works that question fundamental structural problems in society and their effects on the private sphere, Canan identifies power, religion, and politics as the three main issues affecting society (Gündüz, 2023, p. 54). In Canan’s works, the female body is not reduced to the position of a silent object, but begins to gain voice (Taş, 2012, p. 112). Through her art, she aims to highlight the pressures that discourses produced by established institutions and their policies impose on society, particularly on women. Her works frequently foreground issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, and the constraints imposed by gender roles (Yılmaz, 2010, p. 126). In performances and works such as *Odalık* in 1998, *Şeffaf Karakol* in 1998, *Kybele* in 2000, and *Çeşme* in 2000, where she uses her own naked body, Canan is recognized as one of the few female artists in Turkey to openly demonstrate a feminist stance (Antmen, 2017, p. 133). In the 2000s, many women artists addressed the male-dominated and patriarchal order in their work, believing that it was necessary to shift modernist perspectives in order to challenge dominant narratives. Canan stands among these artists, symbolizing women’s freedom and presenting the struggles women face in Turkey. She is known for critiquing masculine politics by addressing women’s identity and stands out through both her works and performances (Madra, 2007, p. 34-40).

The film portrays the social and masculine pressures that a woman, Fadike, faces from girlhood through adulthood. By highlighting the masculine norms ingrained in Turkish culture, it reveals how patriarchal gender codes have permeated society and affected the lives of Turkish women. In critically examining the sources of these oppressions, Canan incorporates the nudity of both men and women in her work, drawing inspiration from shadow theatre.

The work, which begins with the dedication “to my grandmother, mother, and daughter”, draws on personal references from the artist’s life, as she frequently emphasizes in her interviews. For Canan, the personal has indeed become political. The main character, Fadike, who lives in southeastern Türkiye and is the daughter of a poor family, faces pressure to marry, suffers under the masculine discourse within the family structure, and occupies a subordinate position in daily life. These circumstances highlight how the social order hinders a woman’s sense of self. The visual narrative incorporates elements of Turkish shadow play, reflecting the two-dimensionality and shaky movements of the puppets.

In the methodology of this study, the video animation *İbretnüma* (Canan Şenol, 2009), which is the subject of the analysis, is examined from a feminist perspective, while the synthesis of shadow play with contemporary art production practices is explored. It is evident that the humorous perspective present in traditional shadow play is also utilized

¹ This is an extended version of the study presented as an oral presentation at EUPOP (European Journal of Popular Culture), Krakow, Poland.

by Canan in the video animation. At this point, the humorous approach of the Karagöz and Hacivat shadow play is explained, and how this approach is integrated into a narrative in the fable genre is revealed through the lens of feminist film theorists. Key issues such as voice, the female body, and representation, which are also discussed in psychoanalytic film theory, are examined through the perspectives of feminist film theorists, and the content of *İbretnüma* is analyzed accordingly. The thoughts of feminist film theorists such as Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, Ann Kaplan, Linda Williams on these issues are re-analysed in the context of the work. This examination also addresses how traditional art forms are transformed into contemporary art forms and how the artist incorporates them into the work. The subordination of women artists in the art world for centuries and their place within the social order are revisited in these discussions, and Canan's contributions to contemporary art are contextualized in response to Linda Nochlin's famous question, *why have there been no great women artists?*, using a feminist methodology.

The image of women from shadow play to contemporary art

According to Terry Smith "the question of contemporary art has, in fact, been insistently answered more narrowly by the acts of artists and the organizations" (2006, p. 683). Arthur C. Danto, on the other hand, opens contemporary art to philosophical discussion by re-examining the relationship between artworks and reality (2017, p. 115). This focus on questioning can be seen as a key aspect of the representational strategies employed in contemporary art. In contemporary Turkish art², pioneering women artists have distanced themselves from the demands of traditional art and have, perhaps unintentionally, become part of a new artistic approach (Toprak, 2018, p. 221). Over the last thirty years, with the spread of innovative art methods and language, the exploration of gender issues has become a significant corpus in contemporary Turkish art (Pınarbaş, 2021, p. 1831). In this context, the use of contemporary art techniques is evident in the representational language of contemporary art. Susan Langer argues that the essence of a work of art lies in its portrayal of emotion, vitality, individual identity, and lived and felt life (2012, p. 112). Since the conditions for creating art are developed within a specific social environment and are shaped by identifiable social institutions, the nature of the artwork is influenced by these factors (Nochlin, 2008, p. 136). Consequently, Canan's representational language is shaped by the patriarchal system that surrounds her and is further structured by her individual artistic experience. It is emphasized that the idea of re-presenting women is only possible through a critical understanding of representation, which is an approach to art (Antmen, 2017, p. 47).

In the Ottoman Empire, shadow theatre was a thriving artistic activity in Istanbul, where different ethnic groups, languages, and genders came together. These plays humorously

² Turkey contemporary art: In the article, there are different ways of characterizing contemporary artworks produced in Turkey and these characterizations can be seen in the in-text references. This article adopts the characterization of Turkey contemporary art.

represented language, communication, and sexuality, offering audiences a world where norms were turned upside down. Reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of Istanbul, the puppets' dialogues, spoken in various dialects, created conflict, while sexuality was freely expressed without repression. Karagöz plays addressed topics like sexuality, politics, and daily life in an uncensored manner, expanding the boundaries of representation and signification through inanimate puppets. Behind the curtain, the Karagöz artist became the voice of every segment of the public, regardless of gender, religion, language, or race, and represented the public's thoughts (Mizrahi, 2009). In *İbretnüma*, Canan, like a Karagöz artist, assumes the roles of all the characters she creates, portraying them through voice imitation. She continues the tradition of shadow play to critique the social order by representing various segments of the public.

Interdisciplinarity in Contemporary Art :

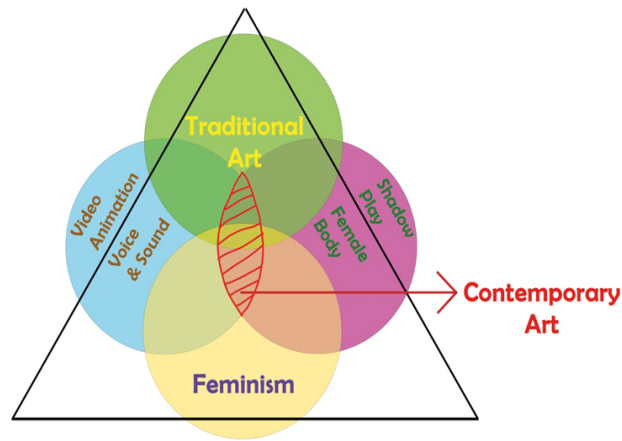


Image 1. Interdisciplinarity in contemporary art. Visuals that embody the relationship between the concepts focused on in this study and contemporary art. The visual of the embodiment of interdisciplinarity in contemporary art. It was designed by Berceste Gülçin Özdemir.

Canan, who reintroduces traditional shadow play to the audience through video animation, not only highlights the transformation of the male-dominated perspective in art, which has also permeated the language of representation in contemporary art. At the same time, by employing the masculine gender codes traditionally used in the portrayal of women with a humorous expression, she challenges and prompts the transformation of these codes. This change signifies the feminist approach within the artist's representational language. Inspired by one of Turkey's traditional arts, Karagöz, or Turkish shadow theatre, Canan's work *İbretnüma* addresses issues such as the patriarchal order, the exploitation of women's sexuality and labor, and incest. While Karagöz originated in Anatolia as a traditional Turkish art form, it has become a shared cultural heritage across a broader region due to its enduring popularity. Encompassing various branches of art, Karagöz has brought together different characters and ethnicities in the Ottoman Empire for centuries. Beyond fiction, Karagöz often mirrors reality, reflecting life itself. The humorous culture of Karagöz and its elements continue to prompt audiences to reflect on their own lives today (Oral, 2009, p. 6).

In *İbretnüma*, Canan tells the story of a woman who migrates from the countryside to the city, incorporating references to Turkish shadow play. This approach offers viewers a contemporary interpretation of a long-overlooked tradition. Shadow theatre was the most popular form of visual entertainment in the Ottoman Empire, appealing to nearly all segments of society. The shows were satirical, addressing both sexuality and politics, with a liberated sexual attitude playing a significant role in the humor. Turkish shadow play, more popularly known as Karagöz, is a form of stage storytelling that can be adapted to any era. Karagöz is an improvised play, where the Karagöz master, known as the *hayali* or "imaginary" develops the play based on current events. These events are presented to the audience with humor, aiming to reveal societal realities through the characters and their relationships. As a result, individuals and ethnic groups that have existed in daily and social life throughout history have been reflected on the Karagöz stage. The tradition of improvisation allows Karagöz to address contemporary stories (Tekerek, 2001, p. 210). It is challenging to determine the exact number of characters in Karagöz due to its foundations in improvisation, eclecticism, and continual renewal. However, the characters can generally be classified as men, women, and children. Common female characters include Chengi (dancing girl) and Zenne (woman in Persian). In addition to these general roles, there are specific characters from well-known plays, such as Leyla from *Leyla and Majnun*, Shirin from *Ferhat and Shirin*, Bloody Nigâr and Salkım İnci from *Bloody Nigar*, and Matiz from *Reverse Marriage*. Additionally, the *cazu* (witches), who appear in many Karagöz plays, are also female characters (Oral, 2009, p. 87-90).



Image 2. Karagöz and Hacivat shadow play characters.
The photograph was taken at the Karagöz and Hacivat Museum.

In the hierarchically stratified society of the Ottoman Empire, Karagöz enjoyed extraordinary freedom. Its sexually charged puns were revolutionary, even when the performances lacked explicit political themes or characters. The subversive political nature of Karagöz was symbolically expressed through the deliberate violation of officially sanctioned cultural norms, values, and linguistic codes (Miller, 2013, p. 2). Karagöz's approach to sexual liberation transcended class boundaries, allowing female

characters to be portrayed more freely, even in a monarchy governed by Sharia law.

Gender and sexuality hold significant importance in Karagöz, which is among the most provocative genres of Ottoman literature. Some European travelers were astonished by the casual mention of sexuality in these plays (Schick, 2011, p. 200-201). To illustrate the shock of Westerners who saw women and children in the audience at "obscene Karagöz performances," Metin And quotes a Turk's response to a foreigner who asked why young girls were allowed to watch the show: "They should learn; sooner or later, they should know. It is better for them to learn these facts than to remain ignorant of these things" (2005, p. 85). Thus, Karagöz is not simply pornography but rather a "symbolic reversal of commonly held norms and behaviors through the medium of sexuality" (Kırlı, 2000, p. 170). The tolerance shown to Karagöz over the centuries extended beyond sexual matters, helping it to overcome political censorship as well (Öztürk, 2006, p. 294). The Karagöz shadow theatre provided a bottom-up critique of power within Ottoman society, highlighting the social constraints shaping everyday life. These shadow plays transcended the boundaries that divided the Ottoman community, not by offering alternative political scenarios for societal organization, but by achieving a greater degree of differentiation among the subject classes. The purpose of Karagöz is to depict societal reality through abstraction, illustrating the essence of a neighborhood not through the events characters experience, but through the types of characters and their relationships (Tekerek, 2001, p. 210). In Karagöz, the puppeteer draws from a series of episodic narratives known by heart. These episodes are performed independently of an overarching plot, allowing the puppeteer, much like a storyteller, to choose which episodes to emphasize (Oral, 2009, p. 140). Similarly, Canan, like a Karagöz puppeteer, narrates the story of Fadike, a character born from her own experiences. Viewing feminism as a form of struggle, Canan utilizes the unique privilege that Karagöz has had since the Ottoman Empire to tell Fadike's story.

Parody of official reason

Canan states that her aim is to write the history of women in their own words, emphasizing that any part of the female body can be an object of representation in *İbretnüma*. She critiques the patriarchal system that assigns specific meanings to parts of the female body, questioning the significance attributed to Fadike's hair, breasts, eyes, and hips. Canan explores how Fadike's celebrated beauty transforms her body into one that is both desirable and, therefore, dangerous. As every part of her body is objectified, Canan examines how Fadike navigates modern life. Through this approach, Canan's voice becomes embedded in the narrative, transforming Fadike's story into the story of every woman living under such a system. According to Canan, Fadike's story encourages women to reconsider how much autonomy they truly possess when they believe they have will power (Gümüş, 2010, 9th January). Committed to writing women's history in her own words, Canan continues to make women visible in all areas where they are ignored. She achieves this through the imaginative narrative of the traditional Karagöz shadow plays.

Throughout the film, Canan also voices male characters, though they speak less than the female characters. However, she primarily tells Fadike's story through a female voice, ensuring Fadike "gets a voice" throughout the film. In the Turkish shadow play *Karagöz*, the main character sometimes acts as a spectator in certain episodes. Canan adopts this dual role of spectator and interpreter, a characteristic of Turkish shadow theatre. This is especially evident in love scenes where the flirtatious female character and the dandy discuss their relationship. This active witnessing places Canan in the roles of both narrator and spectator (Balan, 2008, p. 178). While *Karagöz* represents the voice of the masses watching the shadow play, Canan's voice emerges as that of an audience member interpreting taboo subjects such as female sexuality, homosexuality, and incest—topics that remain hidden and unspoken in male-dominated society.

Since all the plays in *Karagöz* are improvised, the stories and characters from everyday life are vividly reflected on the "screen of dreams." The political stance of *Karagöz* has always been that of the common person criticizing the powerful, consistently representing the opposition (Öztürk, 2006, p. 294-296). This criticism is not limited to political authorities; it extends to all spheres of society, providing entertainment for centuries. Characters in the show often embody ethnic stereotypes of residents from a traditional Istanbul street, reflecting the pluralism of the Ottoman Empire by mimicking various ethnic, religious, and regional personalities.

Karagöz performances, often held in coffeehouses and during nightly Ramadan feasts, were immensely popular events where people of all social classes, genders, ages, and ethnicities could gather and mingle. In the Ottoman Empire, these coffeehouses were among the few spaces where men and women could share the same environment. As a result, *Karagöz* stories frequently included both female and male characters, often reflecting the common division between women, children, and men.

Metin And identifies the female characters in *Karagöz* as "all the zennes, the Circassian odalisque, the gypsy, *Karagöz's* wife, and the sesame-maker" (2004, p. 64). *Zenne*, meaning woman in Ottoman Turkish and derived from Persian, is the general term for women in *Karagöz* plays. These characters often hold a fan, flower, or umbrella in one hand. Young *zennes* typically engage in matters of the heart, while older *zennes* nag and frustrate their husbands. *Karagöz's* wife, for instance, often argues with him, complaining about the lack of food in the house and urging him to work and bring home provisions (Şenyer, 2014, 2nd August). According to Canan Balan, it would be too naive to idealize *Karagöz* by emphasizing its emancipatory role for women (2008, p. 178). However, *Karagöz* did contain liberating elements, such as its critical approach to political affairs and its sexually charged jokes. One source of comedy's pleasure lies in language that defies conventional meaning: accents, dialects, absurd rhymes, puns, and even stuttering are used to subvert traditional meanings. This can extend to the limits of absurdity, potentially offering new possibilities for experimental, pure, and absurd theatre.

In various histories of shadow theatre, writers often quote the astonished reactions of European travelers to the sexual and political freedom in *Karagöz* plays. This explains the

shock of Westerners who observed women and children among the spectators of the "obscene Karagöz performances". A Turk's response to a foreigner who questioned how young girls could be allowed to watch these shows was: They [the young girls] should learn; sooner or later they should know, it is better for them to learn these facts than to be ignorant of these things. Although no one can claim that Karagöz took a liberating approach to the representation of women, as Balan suggests, we must acknowledge the atmosphere of tolerance in a spectacle where men and women participated together.

In conclusion, most Karagöz plays are based on scenes from everyday life, satirized through sexuality. Karagöz theatre addresses a wide range of themes, including circumcision, cuckoldry, romance, supernatural or pseudo-magical elements, disguise, explicit violence, nudity, and sex. The exclusion of sultans, prophets, and religious figures allows Karagöz to challenge the audience's sense of judgment and values (Miller, 2013, p. 2-10). Thus, it is fitting for Canan to choose Karagöz to depict an incestuous relationship, which she focuses on in *İbretnüma*. Karagöz was highly entertaining and unifying for the Turkish people, encouraging "safe" rather than subversive laughter. Canan's choice reflects her reference to a traditional art form popular since the Ottoman Empire, where the audience tolerated hidden fears, unspoken topics, and taboo subjects such as incest.

By using Karagöz, Canan prompts the audience to self-reflect on female sexuality and the moral rules governing it. At the same time, she gives voice to the women and children silenced in male-dominated societies. At the end of her work, Canan refers to another characteristic of Karagöz—its role as the "voice of the silent." Karagöz, also known as a dream play, presents an unreal world to its audience. It doesn't tell a story directly but conveys it through sharp, abstract lines. The visualized world, devoid of perspective rules, is two-dimensional. The structure and characters of shadow theatre verge on irrationality, yet this metaphorical approach allows Karagöz to highlight real events and express hidden truths in society.

The ending is the shortest part of a Karagöz play. Typically, Karagöz slaps Hacivat, who exclaims, "You've destroyed the curtain, it's ruined, I'll tell the owner right away!" Karagöz then threatens Hacivat while providing information about the theme of the next play, telling him what he will do to him. Karagöz then announces the play's end, apologizes for any mistakes, and informs the audience of the next play's name and location before leaving the stage. In *İbretnüma*, Canan does not mention a new play at the end, but instead suggests that Fadike's story is just one of many that could be told, implying that it is neither the first nor the last. In doing so, Canan indicates that the other women's stories she references in her work are interconnected with Fadike's.

Presentation of feminist fable

İbretnüma is based on a fable and tells the story of a young woman in a village in Anatolia. Canan describes her work as a video fable and her narrative role as that of a storyteller (*râvi*) (Şenol, 2010, p. 1). The work, which explores the pressures of male dominance on the female character, also addresses digital surveillance in the modern age. The viewer

follows Fadike's life intimately, witnessing the surveillance of the modern individual, who can be monitored anytime and anywhere in the digital age. In this era of real-time surveillance, every digital data presentation and image production becomes an act of creating and visualizing our own image (Groys, 2016, p. 125).

In examining the relationship between visual culture and cinema, Robert Stam asks, "How is vision gendered and sexualized?" (2014, p. 321). This question is relevant to the representational strategies that digital technologies offer in narrative forms and is one of the questions this study explores. Henry Jenkins updates Walter Benjamin's views on emerging digital theory, stating,

Digital theory can examine everything from the role of CGI special effects in Hollywood blockbusters to communication systems (the Net), new genres of entertainment (computer games), new styles of music (techno), or new systems of representation (digital photography or virtual reality) (as cited in Stam, 2014, p. 326).

Therefore, *İbretnüma* not only visualizes Turkey's patriarchal cultural codes from the past but also highlights the ongoing projection of male dominance in the digital realm. The screen becomes a cyber-chronotope, where both time and space are transformed, showcasing the impact of new technologies on production and aesthetics (Stam, 2014, p. 329). In this context, *İbretnüma* synthesizes traditional indicators of social order with contemporary narrative styles, presenting a moment that dissolves time and space with its humorous, fairy-tale narrative. The humorous presentation of the shadow play and Canan's witty voice-over narration provide a parodic view of the society in which the female character lives. According to Terry Eagleton, humor involves the release of a satisfying tension that mimics orgasm (2020, p. 29). True wit, however, provokes a smile instead of a sigh, demonstrating the superiority of the mind over base senses and appearing as a talent of the soul (Eagleton, 2020, p. 98). The humorous aspect of the presentation reminds us of the provocative and deconstructive nature of art, offering a different perspective on the political critique of the current social order through video animation. The dialectical speech of the narrator, who shifts between an old woman and a soldier, deepens the voice, while the contemporary interpretation of miniatures and shadow puppet performances provides an ironic presentation of existing masculine discourses.

When voice-over dominates a film narrative, it shapes the interpretation of the story. In *İbretnüma*, the voice-over belongs to Canan. Sigmund Freud, in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, states that sound, noise, and what is heard are central to fantasy formation, emphasizing that primitive fantasy is built around sound (as cited in Dolar, 2013, p. 137). When the voice-over describes the female body, it adopts a feminist expression, reframing the masculine gaze on the body in its own terms. In classical narrative cinema, the voice-over is typically authoritative and usually male; Canan reverses this convention in her work. Kaja Silverman emphasizes that sound recording becomes privileged when it engages with the body (1988, p. 49). Silverman's ideas align with Canan's voice-over performance, emphasizing the intimacy of the body. In particular, the female body is rarely displayed or presented naked in Muslim society. The

detailed depiction of the female body in *İbretnüma*, supported by the voice-over, evokes a sense of strangeness. It is the obscenity and unfamiliarity of the sound that make a lasting impression. Echoing Friedrich W. Joseph Schelling, Freud asserts that the strange is "something that is revealed when it should have been hidden." One feels shame when using one's voice because it exposes hidden intimacy to others, and this shame is structural, not merely psychological. Joan Copjec refers to this as "ontological shame" (as cited in Dolar, 2013, p. 83). According to Mladen Dolar, the voice is elusive, existing both inside and outside the law, and thus always posing an urgent threat (2013, p. 169). By representing the ontological shame embedded in the social order, *İbretnüma* compels society to confront itself.

The voice-over in *İbretnüma*, along with the voicing of female characters and making them heard in a society where women are often silenced, serves as a crucial example of the feminist perspective in art. Canan does not address the silencing of women using only a feminist strategy based on voice-over. Through the representation of the female body, she also deconstructs the male gaze embedded in cultural codes.



Image 3. Collage: A scene from *İbretnüma* (Şenol, 2009)

In the film, Canan's naked display of her body disrupts the male-dominated cultural codes that come into play when women are transformed into objects of spectacle. Considering that the naked body is tied to the myth of the lost paradise, and that since the expulsion from paradise, the world is perceived differently, discussing the clothed body becomes a mere reiteration of a well-known fact (Corbin, Courtine & Vigarello, 2007, p. 122). In her work, where she frequently employs naked bodies, Canan reminds us that human existence originates in nudity. She seeks to challenge and destabilize the conservative views imposed on the body with a radically subtle irony, rather than simply restating familiar ideas. The subtle irony in the narrative language and presentation of the work reverses the masculine gaze embedded in the social order. This disruption prevents the male viewer from objectifying the female character as a spectacle. Fadike's body becoming an object of representation is a reality shaped by the pressures exerted on women by masculine discourse.

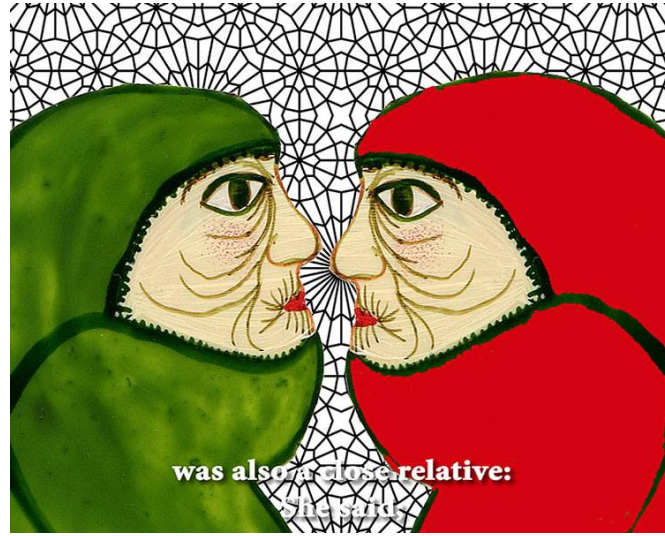


Image 4. The nine. This scene is from the *İbretnüma* (Şenol, 2009)

In this context, Mary Ann Doane's article *Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body* (1988) provides a framework for analyzing the content and formation of Canan's work from a feminist perspective, drawing on feminist discourses. The article, which focuses on cinematic images, begins with the question, "What does a woman want?" and stresses the need for cinema to answer this question. Doane argues that the oppressive portrayal of women in cinema makes the creation of feminist films nearly impossible, likening the camera's movement toward women to a terrorist act. She explains that the production of images and music in cinema is aimed at gratifying the viewer's identity, reinforcing voyeuristic and fetishistic tendencies while avoiding castration anxiety. Doane observes that contemporary filmmaking incorporates visuals and techniques that resist traditional modes of coding and decoding. The purpose of this alienation is not to depict the female body differently, but to uncover the meanings and values of femininity shaped by cultural codes (Doane, 1988, p. 216-217). *İbretnüma* can also be viewed as an example of contemporary filmmaking practice. Furthermore, as this study highlights, new communication technologies underscore the important role of modern filmmaking techniques in presenting traditional, predetermined masculine indicators to viewers. While *İbretnüma* demonstrates that the social order of the female body is coded with masculine indicators, it also emphasizes the need to question this coding. As Doane stated, the uncoded body is an impossibility (1988, p. 218). Canan's work not only illustrates this coding but also encourages viewers to question and deconstruct these imposed cultural codes.

İbretnüma paves the way for contemplating the impossible by presenting the female body with nudity, allowing for a reconsideration of the coded and feared female body, ultimately revealing the underlying fear of castration. In classical narrative cinema, the naked female body implies castration, depriving the male viewer of pleasure and frightening him with the unknown void into which he is drawn. In this context, the animated short film demonstrates the possibility of reversing dominant ideologies on screen, both in form and content. It clearly exposes the ironic aspects of the social order,

showing that the subordination ascribed to women is, in fact, an indicator of the ironic subordination of men themselves.

Vladimir Jankélévitch observes that irony is even more serious than seriousness; it speaks when it should be silent and remains silent when it should speak (2020, p. 170). The use of irony in this work, therefore, suggests that the patriarchal point of view must always be questioned in an ontological context. The fragmented presentation of the female body at the beginning of the animated short film, and its completion through the combination of these parts at the end, exemplifies the ironic perception of women within the social order. The detailed depiction of the female vagina in various miniatures and shadow puppet performances evokes the concept of vagina dentata. Likewise, scenes of naked female figures in the bathtub, the exposure of male characters' penises in the village square, and the women's laughter in response blend reality with the utopian, creating a surreal scenario that prevents the male audience from taking pleasure in the female character.

By presenting these elements, *İbretnüma* challenges viewers to question and deconstruct the patriarchal and ideological constructs imposed on the female body. Through its use of irony and surrealism, the film subverts traditional narratives and highlights the absurdity of societal norms.



Image 5. The husband. Scene from *İbretnüma* (Şenol, 2009)

Therefore, the castration of the male viewer becomes evident. Simultaneously, the possibility arises that the male viewer might derive pleasure from observing the male characters, while the female viewer may find enjoyment in watching the naked bodies of the female characters. This dynamic allows viewers to engage with homoerotic feelings, contributing to the experience of watching alternative films. The patriarchal order, politically critiqued through the representation of the body, continues to challenge social gender stereotypes.

According to Doane, the natural body serves as the marker of sexual difference, thereby adding functionality to such discussions (1988, p. 219). Similarly, Linda Williams asserts

that the female body in cinema is perceived as a problem that exposes sexual differences (as cited in Mayne, 1985, p. 89). In *İbretnüma*, the portrayal of the naked female body and the miniature scenes of intercourse demonstrate the man's realization that there is no adequate tool to symbolize the deficit. Doane questions the stereotypical codes in the representation of women, asking, "Why are the signs assigned to women?" While anatomy is traditionally seen as destiny, she argues that fiction ultimately shapes this concept.

Ann Kaplan points out that Hollywood's narrative mechanism tries to conceal what is natural. In this pleasurable mechanism, which allows voyeurism and fetishism to flow freely, viewers encounter a representation filled with illusion (Kaplan, 2001, p. 13). Doane also references Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva's questioning of why women speak in low voices in the female body (1988, p. 223). In *İbretnüma*, the representation of the female character disrupts the male-dominated pleasurable gaze mechanism. Voyeuristic and fetishistic pleasure is subverted by the portrayal of the female body and the female narrator's voice. The masculine discourses labeled on the body are deconstructed by the gaze of the female characters and female viewers toward the naked female body. The exhibition of adolescent girls' nudity and the homoerotic intimacy between them suggests that male sexuality might not be a factor.

The moral rules imposed on women by gender codes prevent them from exploring sexuality. What we see constructs the mediation in representation between visual culture and real bodies. While Canan uses socio-cultural signs to construct meaning in her work, she successfully reverses the masculine perspective that has been used against women for centuries. In doing so, she radically deconstructs the representation of male figures.

There are now great female artists

Many researchers, historians, and theorists argue about the scarcity of female artists in the annals of art history. In this context, showcasing women through their feminine characteristics, while avoiding a voyeuristic perspective, is crucial for the visibility of women artists. Although some artists in art history challenge the male gaze on the female form, the invisibility of women persists due to the latent sanctions of male domination. In her seminal work, *Why Are There No Great Female Artists?*, published in 1971, Linda Nochlin (2008) posed an important question about the relationship between feminism and art, prompting deep reflection on the subject. Nochlin argues that the belief "there are no great women artists because women cannot be great" is a deeply ingrained and erroneous societal notion. She notes that art, as a direct and personal expression of individual and emotional experiences, requires a consistent form of language, built upon certain conventions, schemas, or code systems that develop over time or independently.

Ideological and political misunderstandings about the subordination of women stem from distorted ideas about how art is produced (Nochlin, 2008, p. 122-129). The conditions for creating art are shaped within a particular social environment, which is an integral

part of the social structure. Consequently, art is influenced by social conditions (Nochlin, 2008, p. 135). Canan presents the patriarchal cultural indicators of her society and positions herself as a subject within the material of art. In one of her works, Canan takes on the role of Fadike, displaying her naked body and donning pieces of a female character's outfit, transformed into jigsaw pieces. In these scenes, Canan's naked body is presented as an object ready to be dressed, surrounded by objects associated with the private sphere, shaped by the male perspective of society. Many of these objects embody discourses imposed on women by society.

As Nochlin highlights, this presentation is reminiscent of Berlin Dadaist Hannah Höch's critique of patriarchy in her photo collage *Pretty Girl*. Höch's nudes reject the male gaze that dominates many art objects. This deconstructive practice shows that representations of women as sexual objects are constructed, far from being natural or given (Nochlin, 2020, p. 32). In *İbretnüma*, Canan radically breaks with the perspective that obscures women's sexuality in Ottoman miniature motifs and shadow play depictions, demonstrating that the female body can be represented from a feminist perspective using contemporary art's narrative strategies. Canan, who identifies as a feminist, describes her feminism as follows:

Everybody contributes in some way to my being a feminist, all the areas of power, the state, my father, my husband, the male art community, the men in society, the male point of view, and so on. This is a natural process; it is not a specially chosen position, and of course, I fight for it (Kaptanoğlu, 2010).

Conclusion

The uniqueness of the artwork is changing and transforming in contemporary art approaches. The basis of this change and transformation lies in understanding the methods and adopting the approaches of contemporary art disciplines. Canan's blending of the techniques used in shadow play in the context of the possibilities of video animation technology also shows how traditional art forms can be used in contemporary art forms. The miniatures, talking characters and moving images in *İbretnüma* are important not only in terms of reuniting traditional art forms with the contemporary, but also in terms of revealing an interdisciplinary understanding of art. Canan has contributed to the deconstruction of existing codes in *İbretnüma* both in terms of technique and content.

In *İbretnüma*, the female body is presented in relation to masculine cultural discourses, independent of the phallus-centred mechanism of the masculine gaze. Through her artwork, the codes associated with social gender gain the potential to be interpreted differently from the entrenched realities of societal order. In this context, Fadike's representation in *İbretnüma* concretely reveals the construction of voyeuristic and scopophilic views inherent in the concept of social gender and the perception of women within the social hierarchy. Fadike's relationships—with her mother, her husband, the social order, and even herself—are fraught with patriarchal signs. How can Fadike internalize her body in a system where she does not even understand herself? Why does

Fadike marry a man she does not desire? How is she allowed to become a child bride? Questions like these clearly demonstrate how patriarchal discourses are perpetuated in the social order. As the foundations of Islamic history were established, so were the roles assigned to men and women, with women being passive and subordinated. Women artists who challenge the codes of masculine domination have played significant roles in changing these societal roles. The fact that Canan, as a woman artist, reveals her existence regarding her own experiences and identity in her work shows the importance of women's existence in terms of the history of art in Turkey, as well as the importance of the representation of traditional art forms in our art history with contemporary narrative forms in terms of its place in the history of art in the world.

The masculine language prevalent in traditional shadow play has been transformed into a feminist language through Canan's video animation. This presentation is an important example of the transformation of masculine language in traditional arts. What is important in the presentation strategy of this transformation is to realize the methodology of catching up with the contemporary by knowing the value and importance of the traditional.

Bibliography

- Altındere, H. & Evren, S. (2014). Contemporary art series-16 artist book-7 Canan: To hell/Cehenneme kadar (1st edition). Art-ist.
- And, M. (2004). Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk tiyatro tarihi (1st edition). İletişim.
- And, M. (2005). Karagöz: Turkish shadow play (1st edition). Dost.
- Antmen, A. (2017). Kimlikli bedenler: Sanat, kimlik, cinsiyet (3rd edition). Sel.
- Balan, C. (2008). Transience, absurdity, dreams and other illusions: Turkish shadow play. Early popular visual culture, 6(2), 171-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17460650802150424>
- Corbin, A., Courtine, J.-J. & Vigarello, G. (2007). Bedenin tarihi 1: Rönesanstan Aydınlanmaya (1st edition) (Trans. S. Özen). Yapı Kredi.
- Danto, C. A. (2017). Sanat nedir? (3rd edition) (Trans. Z. Baransel). Sel.
- Doane, M. A. (1988). Woman's stake: Filming the female body. C. Penley (Ed.), Feminism and film theory (1st edition) (p. 216-228). Routledge.
- Dolar, M. (2013). Sahibinin sesi: Psikanaliz ve ses (1st edition) (Trans. B. E. Aksoy). Metis.
- Eagleton, T. (2020). Mizah (2nd edition) (Trans. M. Pekdemir). Ayrıntı.
- Groys, B. (2016). Akışta: İnternet çağında sanat (1st edition) (Trans. E. Kılıç). Küy.
- Gümüş, P. (2010, 9th January). Canan Şenol ile İbretnüma üzerine söyleşi. Artizan. <https://www.art-izan.org/artizan-arsivi/Canan-senol-ile-ibretnuma-uzerine-soylesi/>
- Gündüz, Y. K. (2023). Çağdaş Türkiye sanatının feminist özneleri ve toplumsal cinsiyet olgusu üzerine hermeneutik bir yaklaşım. Ulakbilge, 80, 42-59. <https://www.ulakbilge.com/makale/pdf/1674562907.pdf>
- Jankélévitch, V. (2020). İroni (1st edition) (Trans. Y. Çetin). Metis.
- Kaplan, A. (2001). Women and film (6th edition). Routledge.
- Kaptanoğlu, E. (2010). Boğaziçi'nde çağdaş sanat röportaj dizisi: Canan Şenol. <https://istanbulmuseum.org/artists/Canan%20senol.html>
- Kırlı, C. (2000). The struggle over the space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845 (Yayımlanmamış doktora tezi). The State University of New York, New York.
- Langer, K. S. (2012). Sanat problemleri (1st edition) (Trans. A. F. Korur). Mitos Boyut.
- Madra, B. (2007). Bir karmaşa alanı olarak görsel sanat. H. Altındere & S. Evren (Ed.), Kullanma kılavuzu: Türkiye'de güncel sanat (1986-2006) (1st edition) (p. 28-43). Art-ist.
- Mayne, J. (1985). Feminist film theory and criticism. Signs, 11(1), 81-100.

Miller, A. R. (2013). Turkish shadow puppetry and the carnivalesque. *Modern languages and literatures annual graduate conference 4*, 1-12.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/mlgradconference/2013Conference/MLL2013/4>

Mizrahi, D. (2009). Osmanlıda Karagöz oyunları. *Toplumsal tarih*, 181, 48-55.

Nochlin, L. (2008). Neden hiç büyük kadın sanatçı yok? (Trans. Ahu Antmen). A. Antmen (Ed.), *Sanat/cinsiyet: Sanat tarihi ve feminist eleştiri* (1st edition) (p. 119-159). İletişim.

Nochlin, L. (2020). *Kadınlar, sanat ve iktidar* (1st edition) (Trans. S. Evren). Yapı Kredi.

Oral, Ü. (2009). *Turkish shadowplay: Karagöz* (1st edition) (Trans. C. Orancı). Ministry of culture and tourism.

Öztürk, S. (2006). Karagöz co-opted: Turkish shadow theatre of the early Republic (1923–1945). *Asian theatre journal*, 23(2), 292-313.

Pınarbaş, Y. (2021). Reflections of women's identity and their social problems on contemporary Turkish art. *Atlas journal*, 7(40), 1827-1842.

<https://atlasjournal.net/index.php/atlas/article/view/439/432>

Schick, I. C. (2011). *Bedeni, toplumu, kainatı yazmak: İslam, cinsiyet ve kültür üzerine* (1st edition) (Trans. P. Tünaydın). İletişim.

Silverman, K. (1988). *The acoustic mirror: The female voice in psychoanalysis and cinema* (1. baskı). Indiana University.

Smith, T. (2006). Contemporary art and contemporaneity. *Critical Inquiry*, 32(4), 681-707.

Stam, R. (2014). *Sinema teorisine giriş* (1st edition) (Trans. Ç. Asatekin). Ayrıntı.

Şenol, C. (2009). *İbretnüma* [Video-animasyon]. Pera Museum, İstanbul.

Şenol, C. (2010). Even a cat has a mustache – Interview with Pelin Tan. x-ist.

Şenyar, E. (2014, 2nd August). *Zenne. Karagöz Hacivat*. <https://www.karagoz.net/zenne.htm>

Taş, T. (2012). Canan: Feminist bir müdahale olarak sanatçının bedeni. *Toplum ve bilim*, 125, 89-114.

Tekerek, N. (2001). Halk tiyatrosu geleneğimizde soyutlama ve yapısal yansımaları.

Çukurova üniversitesi sosyal bilimler enstitüsü dergisi, 7(7), 205-213.

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/50085>

Toprak, A. (2018). Nil Yalter's contribution to the art environment with a feminist approach.

Akdeniz kadın çalışmaları ve toplumsal cinsiyet dergisi, 1(2), 215-234.

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/598835>

Yılmaz, P. (2010). Canan Şenol'un yapıtlarından Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet okuması. *Yedi*,

4, 125-136. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/203697>

Lisans ve telif *License and copyright*

Bu çalışma Atıf-GayriTicari 4.0 Uluslararası ile lisanslanmıştır. Çalışmanın telif hakkı yazara aittir *This work is licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International. Copyright belongs to the author*



Hakem değerlendirmesi *Peer-review*

Çift taraflı kör değerlendirme *Double-blind evaluation*

Çıkar çatışması *Conflict of interest*

Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir *The author has no conflict of interest to declare*

Finansal destek *Grant support*

Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir *The author declared that this study has received no financial support*

Benzerlik taraması *Similarity check*

iThenticate

Dizinleme bilgisi *Indexing information*

TR Dizin, EBSCO, MLA, ProQuest, ERIH PLUS, DOAJ, FIAF

Yazarların katkısı *Author contributions*

% 60 – % 40