

From Within A Life Ethic

My first encounter with Sibel Horada was among scattered parts of a dislocated tree. If it's the right way to put it, we met inside the remnants of a tree. I realized as I was talking to her that the very characteristic freckles on her face in the rare tone of brown, her hair the color of an autumn leaf, and tree parts on the floor were in a strange harmony. The piece I'm referring to, *As If It Never Existed*, was spread out on the floor of the 29th Contemporary Artists Exhibition. It belonged to this person whose way of talking had a remarkable sensibility and self-confidence. The color brown, which I'm sure today has a variety of meanings in her practice, was really a vibration that was emanating from both the artwork and the artist in that encounter. Throughout our friendship, which started that day, I've always thought that she was at peace with the color of earth. Brown is a notable presence in her daily life as much as it is central to her work, primarily in pieces such as *Continuous Monument*, *Impression from the Beech Forest*, *Topuz*, *Fire Chronicles* and *A Void in Retrospect*. This color is as integral to earth and nature as it is to everything that decays and transforms in nature. For Horada, it embodies references to the ground, the foundational, and the settled; as well as to the ephemeral and the elements that are in flux. This doesn't come as a surprise since she is an artist whose interests in materials and their transformation through physical conditions and time are quite distinct.

I have been following from Massachusetts, the beanstalks Sibel Horada has grown as part of the *Large Meadow Exhibitions 2018*— a piece in which she definitely brought out the idea of a monument with the forms she built for the plants to grow on. Currently I'm witnessing the preparations for her exhibition, *An Internal Garden* at Depo, which revolves around hopeful sprouting and regenerative decay, both intrinsic aspects of soil. I have been discovering with awe the natural landscape of Massachusetts, which has an intriguing diversity of plant life and also in which Henry David Thoreau was born and has written countless books on nature. Simultaneously, I have been following Sibel Horada's beanstalks grow and the process through which she built a compost mechanism in Depo, again in a monumental form, which will function both as a space for planting and recycling at Depo.

I recently came across the book *Thoreau's Wildflowers*, published by The Yale University Press in 2016, which includes the daily notes Thoreau took on the seasonal movements of the plants and trees of the city of Concord, Massachusetts. I started to see a connection between the processes of Thoreau watching the soil attentively and writing in his journal and Horada growing plants in her home garden and working with plants in her last two exhibitions in an effort to transform plants into a living memory, a 'discontinuous monument' to use her terminology. When Sibel Horada was describing her process of growing artichokes, noting that she refused to fight the weeds around them, thinking that they are also useful, she said: *The artichokes we have planted out grew for a few months, then shrank and stayed that way... All summer long they haven't born any fruit and remained the same size. The artichokes are still alive and they seem to be healthy.* Whereas Thoreau wrote:

May 16, 1854

Butternut will blossom tomorrow. The great fern by sassafras begins to bloom, probably Osmunda Claytoniana, two feet high now. Interrupted fern, its very dark heads, soon surmounted with green.

April 18, 1858

A dandelion open - will shed pollen tomorrow.

Observing the state of plants day by day is an extension of the belief in the potential of soil. Though as solitary an observer as Thoreau was, Horada is inviting. Her desire to design the exhibition not as a finished presentation but rather as a garden-studio open to the visitors' participation, a memory space that lives through sharing and production, is a testament to this. Previously her exhibition *Fire Chronicles* had become a repository of oral history of those who had things to share about the Izmir fire. Similarly, in this exhibition memories will accumulate around the bountiful soil. Horada's invitation of other artists is an example of how she is generously reshaping the format of the solo exhibition. Gülşah Mursaloğlu's piece, a hole of silica gels, which she foresees will extend the lives of plants, will both live in its own fantastical reality and communicate with Horada's plants. She removed the temporary wall from in front of a window to make Cevdet Ereğ's piece, *Two Double Sided Hands on Grille*, which has been there since 2009, visible. The fact that she is adding this piece to the exhibition is a conceptual gesture, reinventing Ereğ's problematization of the duality of inside and outside. As for the opening night, Horada invited KeKeÇa to do a performance, touching on the theme of waiting. Finally, a book project will emerge from the exhibition that will undoubtedly be the 'timeless monument' of all this memory when completed.

An Internal Garden is reflective of Horada's life ethic, standing against the predatory destruction of the earth and nature, which are still generous in their provision of nourishment to life forms in need. The fact that she is presenting a participatory exhibition in dialogue with soil at Depo, a space uniquely important for its participation in memory studies, can be read as a common vein in Sibel Horada's practices of life and art. Along with the processes of sprouting and yielding fruit, she embraces the idea of decay -which the soil and plant worlds readily anticipate; and through composting she once again manifests her interest in the change and transformation of materials. The compost mechanism is a poetic machine that functions to return what is taken from the soil back to it; reminding us that the soil and the plant world exist in its own reality outside of the human demands for endless fertility. Just like when she asked us to lend an ear to the sounds of a machine that was to recede into history in *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place*, here, Horada has designed a space for movement and reproduction that embraces all stages of nature.