



Fig. 1: Firat Arapoğlu, President of AICA Turkey. Photo: Elif Kahveci.

## INTERNATIONAL/INTERVIEW

# THE IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IS HUGE, BUT HUMANITY MUST CONTINUE TO BE CREATIVELY LOVING AND HOPEFUL

*The Journal Arte & Crítica talks with art historian Firat Arapoğlu. He is Vice President 2020-2023 of the International Association of Art Critics-Turkey and President of AICA Turkey*

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES**  
**ABCA/SÃO PAULO AND PRESIDENT OF AICA**

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – Could you tell us a little about AICA Turkey history?

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – The first association of art critics established in Turkey was AICA - Turkey as a Turkish branch of AICA (Association Internationale des Arts critiques / International Art Critics Association). AICA opened its first branch in Turkey in 1953 and 6th International Congress of AICA was held in Istanbul in 1954. During 1970's, AICA started to publish a quarterly research journal called "Art-Literature", but only four issues could be realized. After the military coup d'état on 12 September 1980, it was forced to dissolve itself like all the associations at that time. From 1980's to 2000's, there was not many actions that we could see, and AICA re-established in 2003 after a long-term silence period.

Since 2003, AICA-Turkey realized many events such as "Art Criticism and Curatorial East of the EU", an international workshop and panel discussion in 2003, in the framework of 8th International Istanbul Biennial. In

2012, we realized a national congress called "Testimonies and Shares: Visual Arts in Turkey from 1980 to Date" and we converted it into a book which was published in 2019. Same year, we organized a panel discussion called "Collective, Collaborative and Creative Consciousness Conference with Contemporary Art Professionals from Neighbor Countries" in which Shulamit Bruckstein, Irina Chmyreva, Razvan Ion, Rachel Sukman, Syrago Tsiara, Beral Madra and me were the panelists. We deciphered it and put on our website [www.aicaturkey.org](http://www.aicaturkey.org). We shortly, have been trying to realize these kinds of events regularly.

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – Could you tell us a little bit about the International conference you have organized in November past year? What were the main results obtained in the meeting? According to the debates, what were the impacts and the news brought by the pandemic in the art scene?

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – Well, we realized an international online conference called "Artworld, Reflexes and

Alternative New Worlds” which was held between November 25-27 2020, and the keynote speakers who we invited were Pascal Gielen, Marlies de Munck, Irina Chmyreva and Julian Stallabrass. In addition, there were important researchers who presented their research such as Beral Madra, Gabriele Romeo, Efe Korkut Kurt, Müge Ertem, Paul O’Kane, Susanne Fessé, Rose Vickers, Deborah Schulz, Hakan Yaman, Alper Raif İpek, Jean Bundy, İpek Yeğinsü, Ecem Arslanay, Raoul V. Kübler & Melike Kübler, Ozan Yavuz, Özlem Demirkan, Luciane R. N. Garcez & Sandra Ramalho e Oliveira, Ezgi Ararat Cüceoğlu, Gonca Katman and Merve Şahin.

In this conference, which was supported by Borusan Inc. and SAHA Association, important issues were discussed in detail such as “*Proximity, Art and Democracy*”, “*Covid 19 - Possible achievements in the pandemic process*”, “*Wearing Technological Masks: How did the Pandemic Affect the Relationship between Art and Space?*”, “*The Role of Online Watching Rooms in Art Fairs*” and “*Reading Theater: An alternative performance in the pandemic process*”.

The coronavirus pandemic emerged, and the quarantine decisions were made in March; Çiğdem Zeytin who is one of our board members proposed an item for our agenda: An online international conference. Organizing an online conference at that time was both difficult and necessary with limited financial means and a process where everyone was confined to homes.

We quickly formed the organizational details of the conference as board of directors. After introducing the conference content, we completed the fields such as Scientific Committee Members, Participation Conditions and started to disseminate the information both nationally and internationally. Many important names from the national and international arena have agreed to take part in our Scientific Committee. In total, we decided on 20 conference papers, 10 of which were from Turkey.

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – Concerning the next Congress in Turkey? What is the theme chosen to be discussed. And what is its importance in the present moment?

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – Our conceptual framework is offered by Sinan Eren Erk who is a board member of AICA Turkey as “*Intellectual Aftermath*”. Let me share some parts of it here:

*“The 20th century, which can be referred as the age of reason, was the century of boundless promises, while the 21st century came to be the century of great collapses. Since the early 1900s, the significantly accelerated human constraint towards both nature and the other, is backfired today. While the political discourses are becoming dramatically severe, the repartition of wealth is getting even more disproportionate.*

*In this polarized world, the abstentionist minority is continuously being outnumbered by the ones who are driven by ideologies tend towards fanaticism, and the rest towards alternative ways of living. Today, the insatiable machine of globalization is deteriorating, climate disasters and epidemics are occurring one after another. The economy-based unitary structure is crackling, the systems we are asked to trust are shivering,*

*and the cold barrel of the egocentric view is returning to its creator thoroughly.*

*It is indeed the intellectual aftermath that stands equidistantly from us and paves the way for rethinking the concept of modern life, acting as a counterweight in an already unbalanced order”.*

So, in this case, we want to arise some questions such as What will be the outcomes of this process, which will reshape our lives unprecedentedly? Will humanity manage to repair the structure it has developed, or will it have to do it all over again? What role will art theory, practice, and criticism play, from the political to the economic, social, psychological and cultural perspectives, in the understanding of the intellectual aftermath and the shaping of this state of change? Will they become independent from the economic criteria and ideologies while growing into one of the key elements of a new kind of socio-political discourse? Or is it the inevitable destiny of art to be one of the dynamics that will

dissolve into the system?

At the end by bringing art in its focus, the 53rd International AICA congress aims to examine the intellectual aftermath, the most apparent reality of our age, and to explore the possible new horizons to the future.

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – Would the congress be in person or online?

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – We wish the congress to be held face to face in a congress hall which is in the center of Istanbul during the Istanbul Biennial would be still ongoing. By then, we hope that the pandemic will end, and if the global Coronavirus vaccination process is also completed, we can make the event happen. Of course, we also consider the possibilities of a hybrid conference with face-to-face and online meetings, and a fully online conference as well.

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – What is its importance and what is the expected impact in Turkey

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – Turkey was left alone because of actual governments’ wrong moves in foreign policy during the recent years. The actual government’s wrong decisions prevented the country from assuming organizational tasks in cultural, political and economic fields. Although this situation continues, as we are organizing the AICA Congress in Turkey, we would like to produce ideas together by inviting art critics and social scientists. We think that this meeting will be an important sign of Turkey’s possible democratic and egalitarian future.

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – Could you talk a little bit about the Anadolu Kültür? What is the result expected for the cultural life in Turkey?

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – Recently many operations have been organized against Anadolu Kültür and the authorities claim the following: “Anadolu Kültür deepened and expanded the Gezi Park protests”. Anadolu Kültür was accused of organizing some meetings. Such meetings were held in many parts of Turkey. For example, many forums were

held in the park areas and I would also like to add that I attended some of these meetings. The Gezi Park Resistance is not the resistance of a person or a group, but a popular uprising seen for the first time in the history of this geography. Well, I did not forget your question! Why is an operation organized against Anadolu Kültür which operates in the field of civil society?

Anadolu Kültür was established in 2002 in order to enable cultural and artistic activities to reach other cities outside of Istanbul and to support art production in these cities. Businessperson Osman Kavala, who has been detained for more than three years and is known for his works in the field of civil society, is the chairman of the board of directors of this non-profit organization. Those who support the projects and activities are written on the website of the institution: Delegation of the European Union to Turkey, German Consulate General, Open Society Foundation, Swedish Consulate General, British Council, Garanti Bank. Anadolu Kültür organized

events such as panels, interviews, concerts, exhibitions, workshops, documentary and films screenings in many different cities of Turkey such as Diyarbakir, Istanbul, Batman, İzmir, İstanbul, Ankara, Aydın, Kars, Mardin and Antakya.

Anadolu Kültür was founded to contribute to the formation of a transparent and democratic Turkey through art. It aimed to mobilize disadvantaged groups that could not reach art easily and to eliminate geographical inequality in the country. Terminating the activities of Anadolu Kültür will create irreversible damages in culture and art life in Turkey.

**LISBETH REBOLLO GONÇALVES** – Are there any other issues you would like to talk about?

**FIRAT ARAPOĞLU** – The impact of the coronavirus pandemic is huge, but humanity must continue to be creatively loving and hopeful. There is still a social distance warning and it seems unlikely to narrow that distance in a short time. But on the other hand,

I think we can build the “new art world” of future based on today’s reality. In this kind of gatherings, we can discuss how we may shape it.

*Fırat Arapoğlu* is an art historian (PhD)/art critic & independent curator. He lives and works in İstanbul. He has been working in Economic, Administrative and Social Sciences Faculty, Department of Social Sciences, Altınbas University as an Assistant Professor. He curated numerous exhibitions in Turkey and abroad, most recently including: “Future Unforgettable”, Krassimir Terziev solo show (2019, Versus Art Projects, İstanbul), The Fifth Agreement, Esra Satiroglu solo show (2019, Summart, İstanbul), and “Simbart One-Day” solo show programmes. He co-curated 3rd International Canakkale Biennale and 3rd and 4th *International Mardin Biennales*. He has written articles in national and international art magazines such as *Sanat Dünyamız*, *Genç Sanat*, *Art-İst Modern & Actual*, *ICE*, *ARTAM*, *Art Unlimited*, *Critical Culture*, *RH+*, *İstanbul Art News* and *Flash Art*. He has also written articles in national newspapers called *Birgün*, *Cumhuriyet* and *SOL*. He has also written national and international symposium proceedings about art and art education and has been

*giving lectures in İstanbul Modern Art Museum, Moda Sahnesi, Atölye Maçka, Narmanlı Sanat, İstanbul Bilgi University. He is President of AICA - Turkey (International Association of Art Critics-Turkey) and 2020-2023 Vice-President of AICA International.*