

**Art Unlimited: We are very curious about Allianz Kulturstiftung's point of view on art. What does art mean for the institution?**

**Esra Küçük:** First of all, it is obviously impossible to define once and for all what “art” is. The discourse on and the practices of art are evolving continuously and can therefore mean a million different things to different people. That’s why art has the unlimited potential to surprise and to challenge us.

At the Allianz Kulturstiftung, we believe in the transformative power of art and culture to promote social cohesion in Europe and to bring people together – also across national boundaries. For us, Turkey is an important member of the European concert.

As a cultural foundation we are interested in artists that critically reflect on their role within a society, and in artworks that seek to engage with people beyond cultural bubbles. We have a focus on supporting young, up-and-coming artists and cultural practitioners in Europe and enabling the next generations to pursue an artistic practice that transcends borders. That’s why we support a number of different residencies and grant schemes, as they often develop a unique perspective on questions of identity, belonging and politics. But the questions only begin with individual artists. We also need to take a look at structural issues. An artwork is always set in a certain place, at a certain time, and is accessible to a certain group of people. That is why art needs to be critically interpreted in its context – we need to ask questions such as “Who has access?”, “Who gets represented and how?”, “Who is part of the production?”.

That’s why we also fund projects on the borders of Europe, e.g. on the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios, both so-called “hotspots”. These projects involve different social groups – local communities, newcomers, international artists –creating new possibilities for social interaction.

And lastly, given the challenges we face today, whether it’s the climate crisis, the pandemic, structural racism, the upheaval caused by nationalism – you name it –, more than ever, we need visionary and daring ideas to imagine a different model of living together. Art can empower us to do that.

Having said all that, let me make one last point: One should always be wary of an instrumental understanding of art. Art does not serve a specific purpose, and political change can only be brought about through political action. But art can help us to envision that change.

**Art Unlimited: What kind of works have been carried out/supported until today in artistic terms?**

**Esra Küçük:** Our current program is called “The art of bringing Europe together” which is part of a broader engagement for an open and diverse society – a pluralistic, heterogenous idea of society that strengthens resilience and deepens our tolerance of the ambiguities of modern life. Within this framework, we support projects all over Europe and the Mediterranean region, from participatory performances in Italy to trans-traditional musical performances to contemporary Jewish art in Poland. We do not distinguish between disciplines but are open to all kinds of artistic practices. However, this is just a glimpse of our portfolio. In the past, we also supported contemporary dance in Beirut or literature festivals in the Balkans. Culture needs open spaces, and the Allianz Kulturstiftung sees itself as a partner in creating the framework for that.

**Art Unlimited: How has your relationship with Tarabya Culture Academy been shaped? Can you tell the story of your initiative to support Tandem scholarships this year?**

**Esra Küçük:** Let me start by saying that in Germany, the Tarabya Culture Academy is one of the most prestigious and highly regarded residency programs for artists and writers. I know many Tarabyafellows and appreciate their work, for example Nino Haratischwili, Nevin Aladag, or Marc Sinan.

But I always felt that with such great artists in such a great location in Turkey – directly next to the Bosphorus – there was the potential for more than “just” a great program for artists based in Germany. There was the potential for Tarabya to become an integral part of the unique cultural dialogue between artists from Turkey and Germany. What was lacking was a specific program, one that acknowledges the contributions of the Türkyeli artists. Or, to put it more bluntly: a program that acknowledges the material needs of artists who, especially in times of the pandemic, still largely work under precarious conditions with little financial security. A true cooperation also has a simple material dimension, and our hope is that with the Tandem scholarships we will help bring about this kind of cooperation – in particular in these challenging times.

**Art Unlimited:** As the director of the Allianz Kulturstiftung, you also take part in the jury and advisory board that chooses the academy's guest artists. What kind of responsibility do you feel in this area? How would you list the main factors that guide your decisions?

**Esra Küçük:** First off, I am only a member of the jury of Tarabya. The advisory board is composed of German parliament members and representatives of the Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and the chancellor's office. The jury's duty is to select artists for the scholarships and recommend them to the advisory board; they have the final say.

As part of the jury I am of course looking forward to seeing the applications for the Tandem scholarships. I see this as a great responsibility. We should never forget how much work it is to apply for something and therefore should treat the decision of whom to choose with great care. When it comes to evaluating applications, I always try to form a holistic idea of the applicant – where does she or he stand in her/his artistic career, why would she/he want to go to Tarabya, what are the expectations, what could be the benefits, does she/he show a real interest in engaging with the local realities? And how will her or his work be influenced by this experience in Istanbul? It's not always the most brilliant artist with the best references that is the best fit for a scholarship. It also depends a lot on where he or she stands in her/his individual development.

**Art Unlimited:** You are reading from the Turkey-Germany cultural exchange perspective how? How would you describe the contributions of this beautiful relationship, which has progressed with countless supports and partnerships over the years, in the global art environment?

**Esra Küçük:** The cultural relations between Germany and Turkey are so multifaceted and historically rich that it is hard to overstate their importance. Let me therefore just name one example that illustrates their significance.

Just some days ago, we supported the opening event of a cultural festival we support. The event was on the 30th anniversary of the Day of German Unity, and it critically asked who has continuously been excluded from the narrative of a re-unified Germany. At the beginning of the event there was a screening of some scenes from the movie DUVARLAR-MAUERN-WALLS by Can Candan. He had conducted interviews with

Turkish-German “guest workers” and their children immediately after the fall of the wall; and he asked them about how they perceived the changes in German society.

These images, these testimonies were incredibly helpful in understanding our present situation – why racism has erupted with unprecedented force after the unification and why our society still grapples with its status as an immigrant society. So it’s an artwork by an artist from Turkey that is both a historical document and a contribution to today’s debates in Germany. It helps us better understand where we come from, and where we stand. It is moments like these that show me how rich and dense the cultural relationship between Turkey and Germany is. And I believe this relationship is special also within the global art environment.