

A Selection from Zişan's Utopie Folder (1917-1919)

Posthumous Production Series (Wayward Script, 1917-2013, fiber crops)

İz Öztat in conversation with Cristina Anglada, Judith Raum and Juan Sánchez

Three Conversations

İz Öztat and Cristina Anglada

3-7

۷-۳

İz Öztat and Judith Raum

12-13

۱۳-۱۴

İz Öztat and Juan Sánchez

14-15

۱۵-۱۶

Biographies:

Cristina Anglada (Madrid, 1984) is a curator, researcher and contemporary art critic. She has a Master's Degree in Contemporary Art History and Visual Culture (University Complutense of Madrid and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2002-2007) and a Bachelor's Degree in Art History (University Complutense of Madrid, 2010-2011). She is the founder and director of the online magazine for contemporary art *Nosotros-art*, which analyses and promotes Madrilian contemporary young art scene. Currently she is preparing several exhibition projects in different formats: *Hey Moon: Doce* (a fanzine that she curated in collaboration with Moosoon Publishing); an exhibition co-curated with Tolo Cañellas at the New Gallery (Febrero 2013); and an intervention with the artist Feréstec at José Robles web's gallery (2013).

www.nosotros-art.com

İz Öztat (1981) lives and works in Istanbul. She completed her BA degree in visual arts with honors at Oberlin College, Ohio and her MA degree in visual arts and communication at Sabancı University, Istanbul. She is currently a candidate for PhD in Art Practice at Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul. She lectured at Kadir Has University between 2009 – 2011. In 2008, she co-founded Cura Bodrum residency in Muğla as an investigation into self-organization and non-institutional support mechanisms. Since 2011, she is the director of Cda-Projects Grant for Artistic Research and Production. Her selected exhibitions include 'I am not dealing with triangle, square and circle', Maçka Art Gallery (Istanbul, 2012), 'Underconstruction', Apartment Project (Berlin, 2012), 'Second Exhibition', ARTER (Istanbul, 2010), 'When Ideas Become Crime', DEPO (Istanbul, 2010), 'Public Idea', 5533 (Istanbul, 2010).

www.izoztat.com

Judith Raum (1977) studied Fine Art as well as Philosophy, Art History and Psychoanalysis in Frankfurt/Main and New York City. In her work, she investigates qualities of subject-object relationship through painting, objects, performing, writing and interviewing. Recent exhibitions include *disestablish*, Pavillon Lucca, L'Inspecteur des Cultures, Kunstverein Langenhagen, *Same time Tomorrow*, Kunstpavillon Innsbruck, *harmless entrepreneurs*, uqbar Berlin and *abstract derive*, Ludlow 38 New York City. Judith Raum is currently a fellow at the Graduate School for the Arts and Sciences at the University of Fine Arts Berlin.

www.judithraum.net

Juan Sánchez is the owner of *Espartería Juan Sánchez* on Cava Baja. His shop functions as a node that connects vegetable fiber producers, craftsmen and consumers. He has been learning various weaving techniques and passing them on.

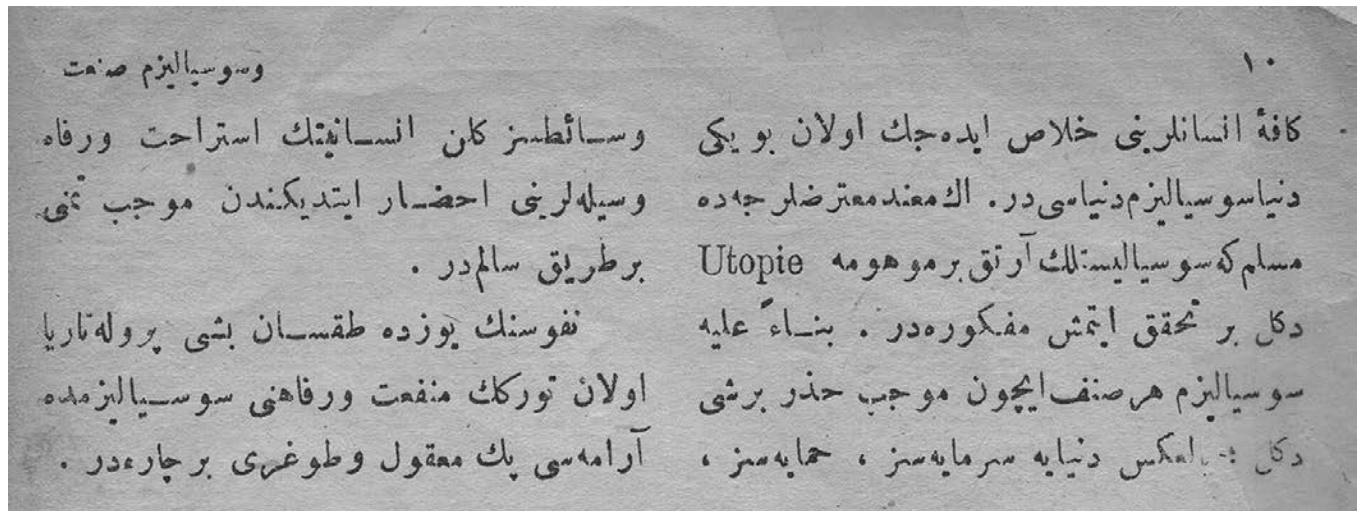
www.esparteria.com

Cristina Anglada and İz Öztat

Cristina Anglada (CA)

İz Öztat (İÖ)

*Detail from a page placed on the cover of
The Utopie Folder taken from the first issue
of Kurtuluş journal (September, 1919)
published by Turkish Workers and Peasants
Socialist Party.*



9

CA: Who is Zişan?

İÖ: Any biographical information that I can provide here will be partial and from my perspective. What we know about Zişan is based on her extensive and carefully organized archive of texts, photographs, collages and drawings. She appears as a heroine in camouflage -embodying multiple selves both as a survival tactic and in reference to Nietzsche's revelation of eternal return- and provides us with contradictory traces of her life. We are confronted with a woman, who drifted with political commitments, coincidences and obscure obsessions ...

CA: How did you get to Zişan?

İÖ: She is arriving gradually by channeling and initiated research projects that delve into her archive.

CA: How does she end up in Spain in 1917, where the selected documents from The Utopie Folder were produced?

İÖ: Zişan, born in Istanbul in 1894, embarks on a European quest in 1915 as she flees from the Armenian genocide. Her first stop is Berlin, where she works as a photographer. She gets involved with the radical left and the people who will soon be known as Berlin Dada. Near the end of 1916, she

travels to Paris on a mission delivering documents for an anti-conscription campaign. At this point, she is quiet disillusioned and Spain's neutrality in the Great War allows for a recovery trip through Barcelona, Madrid and Murcia.

CA: The selected documents from this period were all placed in The Utopie Folder by Zişan. Why did she choose this title for them?

İÖ: All the fragments in The Utopie Folder are Zişan's attempts to shape temporalities that are oriented beyond existing conditions. The exhibited selection relates to her journey through Spain except for one. The cover page of the folder is from a journal that we were finally able to identify; the first issue of Kurtuluş (September, 1919) that was published by the newly founded Turkish Workers and Peasants Socialist Party. The German word Utopie appears in Latin alphabet, while the rest of the text is in Ottoman script. She must have organized the documents at a later date to create the Utopie Folder and this page was placed at the beginning of the folder.

We don't have access to her intentions and can only speculate about the potential readings of this document from now. It confronts us with the impacts of Language Reform (1928) in Turkey, which imposed a brutally fast transition from Ottoman script to Latin alphabet. Today, the text on the page would be decipherable only for those who learn the abandoned Ot-

Cristina Anglada (CA)

İz Öztat (İÖ)

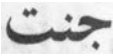
toman script and a vast vocabulary that is not in use any more. The single legible word for generations accustomed to the Latin alphabet is Utopie, which was a new notion then and couldn't be translated to Ottoman.

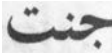
The sentence in which the word Utopie appears reads as follows:

The new world, which will lead all the people to honesty, is the world of socialism. Even the most stubborn objectors admit that socialism is not an imagined utopia any more but a realized ideal.

In 2013, after the disastrous end of utopian visions and suppressive manifestations of state socialism, I don't know what can be recovered from this statement except for the beauty of naïve conviction ...

CA: The two drawings from Zişan's Utopie Folder, osmanlıca and El Círculo del Eterno Retorno (Circle of Eternal Return), seem to be part of a written narrative that you are not showing ...

İÖ: They relate to a utopia/dystopia written by Zişan, set in an island in the shape of a word in Ottoman script, , which could be read both as cennet (paradise) and cinnet (possessed) since the vowels are not written. The intended reading of the word would depend on the context and this ambiguity becomes a narrative apparatus utilized by Zişan as she keeps the reader bouncing between a utopia (cennet) and dystopia (cinnet).

In the same story, Zişan describes the machine that we see in the other drawing: Making one's own Circle of Eternal Return is a rite of passage for the  Cennet/Cinnet (Paradise/Possessed) commune. To be initiated in the ritual of relating to time as duration, every child has to learn the nature of vegetable fibers and craft their own machine, which is activated with blue snails collected along the shores of the island.

Her diary entries suggest various influences that result in several manifestations of this machine throughout her journey in Spain. She meets a small avant-garde community taking refuge in Barcelona at the time. The drawing belongs to this period and might be inspired by the anti-utopian, primitive machines of Francis Picabia. We know that she came across his work since she has a copy of the first issue of 391, a self-initiated magazine by Picabia. Yet, her diary entries elaborate on how she constructs the machine with esparto grass and cane in Murcia, where she spends the summer living with a community engaged in crafting vegetable fibers. Thus, the machine in its various manifestations suggest a playful critique of rationalism and

the coming machine age, as well as her deep engagement with materials and processes that articulate an animistic relationship with inanimate objects.

CA: One of the documents is a blueprint of a waterfall, under which there is a quotation from Ortega y Gasset, I am I and my circumstance. What does this document suggest, especially if we try to read it in relationship to the title of Zişan's autobiography, Every name in history is I and I is other?

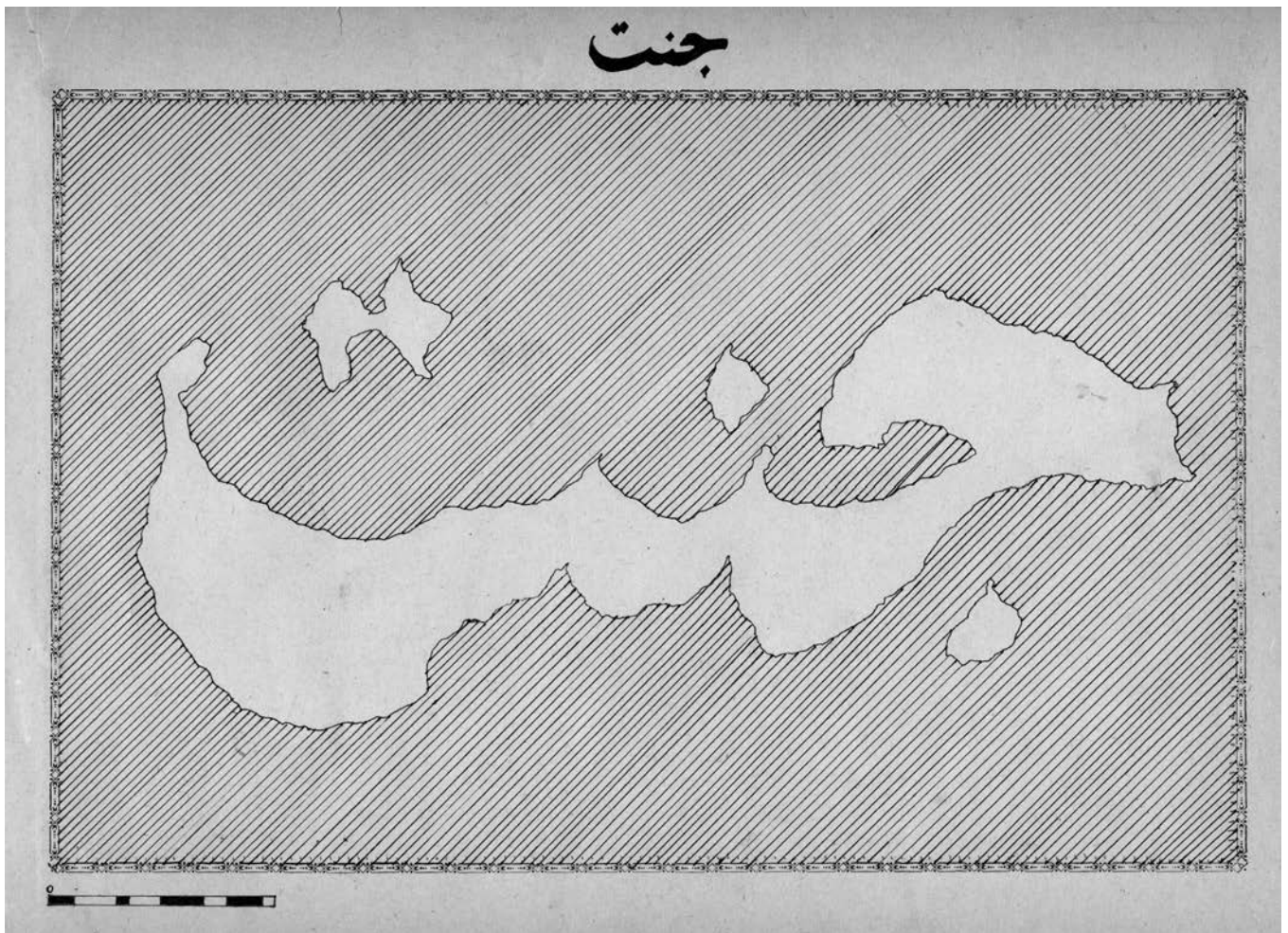
İÖ: Let me briefly say something about the image and the major role of photography in Zişan's life. She learns the skill as a teenager, while she spends time in her Armenian father's photo studio in Istanbul. Working as a photographer enables her to make a living wherever she goes but also acts as a catalyzer for many relationships. The waterfall is one of the many images where water is used as a metaphor for her inner emotional landscape.

Both the title of her autobiography, Every name in history is I and I is other, and the quote from Gasset, I am I and my circumstance, are riddles about the self that Zişan articulates throughout her work. Zişan's understanding of time as duration, which enables previous experiences to return, suggests lapses in time as well as in the self. Receiving all the other possible selves allows for a durational dialogue and empathy. Gasset's perspectivism resonates with her as a consciousness about the situatedness of knowledge, leading to agency in sculpting her own destiny.

CA: The anti-conscription poster that Zişan made to seduce away from enlisting in the military reveals her disillusionment with World War I and rising nationalisms. How do you relate this feeling with the current historical moment we are living?

İÖ: The sketch is one of the few propaganda materials in her archive that include photographs of women's gangs. These moments in which she can engage politically through collective production are incredibly fulfilling and possibly what enables her to bare the disillusionment.

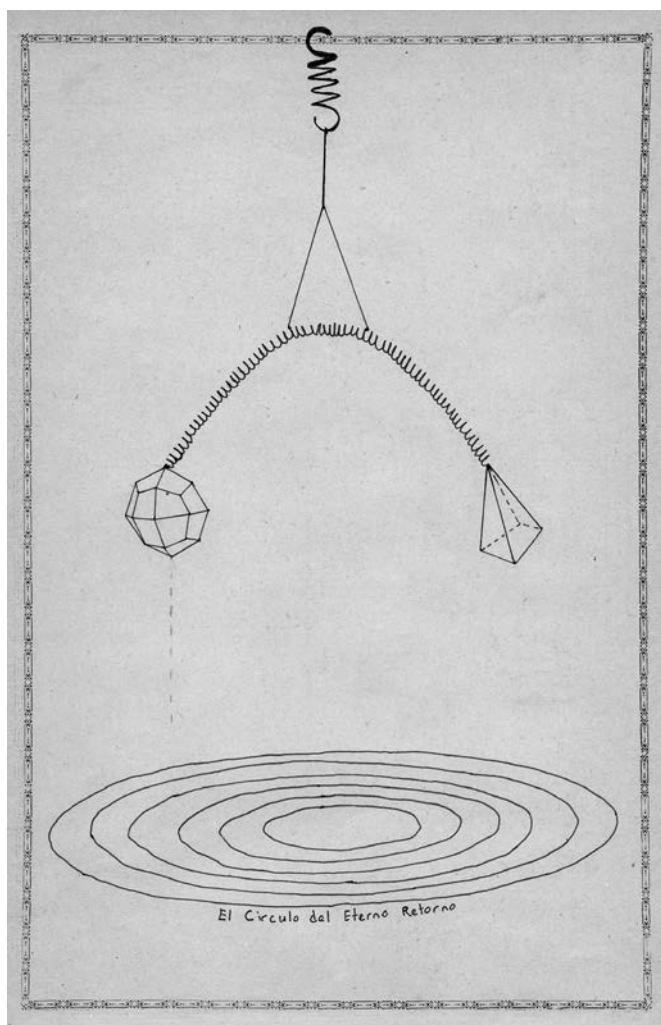
Now... The condition of rising nationalisms and constant war didn't change even though the systems and technologies perpetuating them transformed considerably. Still, what prevents disillusionment is articulating collectivities that can imagine conditions beyond the existing ones.



Map of osmani جنت/Cinnet

(Paradise/Possessed)

Island from The Utopie Folder



*Drawing for The Circle of Eternal Return
from The Utopie Folder*



*Posthumous Production Series
(The Circle of Eternal Return, 1917-2013,
fiber crops, spring)*

If the work of another translates my dream, his work is mine. —Francis Picabia⁵⁶

*Picabia, Francis. I am A Beautiful Monster:
Poetry, Prose and Provocation. The MIT
Press, 2007*

Cristina Anglada (CA)**İz Öztat (İÖ)**

CA: In which sense do you consider her your alter ego?

İÖ: As I get to know her through her archive, I find a lineage in her that I long for. She chose to remain invisible throughout her life by keeping her public appearances anonymous and by using pseudonyms. She didn't identify as a writer or artist. These decisions enabled her to produce without having to mythologize herself or confirming to the existing tendencies.

In collaborating with her, I can articulate a methodology of intuition that presents itself as a return and a relationship with time as duration conflating various dimensions.

CA: How do you approach Zişan's archive to construct her identity, your research and artistic work?

İÖ: Inheriting an archive is a complicated responsibility since you become responsible for how the owner of the archive gets narrated and enters history. Luckily, Zişan's work is fragmented, inconsistent and even contradictory. Thus, I am content with making small fragments visible as the necessary research on them gets carried out. Each time she is included in an exhibition, there is a different approach based on the work chosen. I try to contextualize the chosen fragments in relation to her biography and make them resonate with the contemporary moment. I also produce my own work inspired by hers in the Posthumous Production Series. Instead of monumentalizing the documents, I prefer to take her traces as departure points to articulate a process for myself, in which I can conflate different temporalities and personal experiences.

CA: You are displaying new works titled Posthumous Production Series (Wayward Script, 1917-2013, fiber crops), which are produced in response to the displayed documents as well as her experience of living in Murcia with a community engaged with crafting vegetable fibers. Why did you choose to make the craft central to your production in response to her work?

İÖ: Although it might not become apparent with the displayed documents, Zişan has extensive notes from this period that articulate craft as an enigmatic power. She suggests a critique of capitalism by evoking a magical conception of the body in relation to imaginatively conceived objects and tactile processes. She occasionally identifies herself with the travelling "journeyman", a craftsman who crosses borders to exchange experiences

and practiced knowledge.

When she arrives in Murcia, she offers people to take their photographs in exchange for a space to be used as a darkroom. She gets engaged with the community while composing tableau vivants that transform into wild scenes. Then, she starts to learn techniques for working with vegetable fibers and spends the whole summer making the obscure objects that are described in her stories.

CA: What was your experience of working with vegetable fibers like? What did you end up articulating through it?

İÖ: I found Juan Sánchez's Esparteria on Cava Baja and spent time in his shop, learning a few techniques, sensing the materials and peaking into the everyday life of the shop.

Esparto grass has an absolutely unruly nature but very robust surfaces can be created with weaving technique called pleita. Maintaining the tension between the rigid structures created from vegetable fibers and the unruly nature of esparto, I recreated the machine, The Circle of Eternal Return, and two text pieces.

The inaccessibility of language and the dependence of meaning on context manifested in the materials and the processes I invented with them. In Posthumous Production Series (Wayward Script I Utopie, 1917-2013, cane webbing, esparto grass), Utopie is legibly inscribed on one side of the cane webbing and it becomes a wild garden of esparto on the other side. For Posthumous Production Series (Wayward Script I I am I and my circumstance, 1917-2013, cheese girdle made with esparto grass, photograph) The quote from Gasset is sawn on a cheese girdle made from esparto with the pleita weaving technique. It is accompanied by a photographed wheel of cheese with "circumstance" written on its circumference. This machine made cheese mimicking the texture of pleita on its surface fascinated me. I needed to bring together the original material for the texture and the simulation, which ended happening in this piece. The sentence, I am I and my circumstance, became fragmented and obscured as I translated into materials.

CA: Did you or Zişan ever have contact with this material in Turkey?

İÖ: We didn't but we could have according to the story that Judith Raum has to tell ...

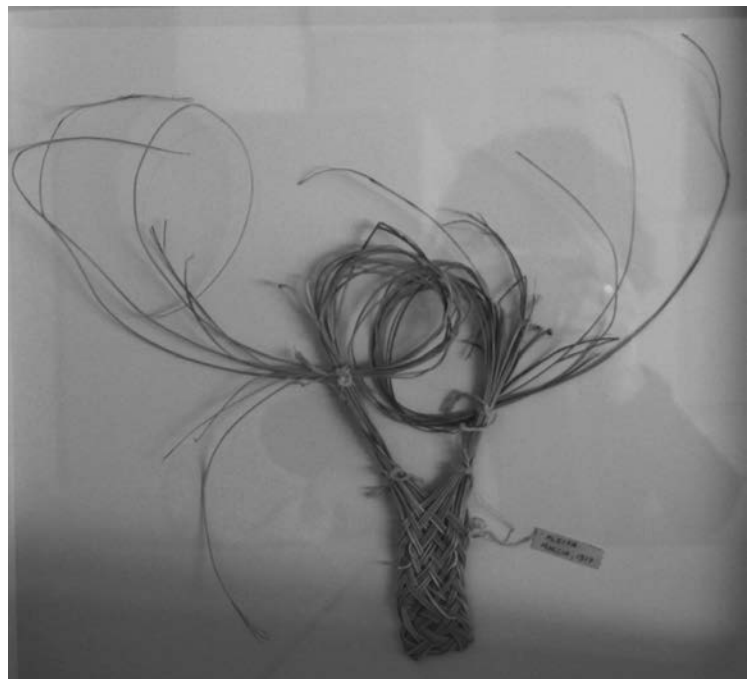


Posthumous Production Series
(Wayward Script I I am I and my circum-
stance, 1917-2013, cheese girdle made
with esparto grass, photograph)

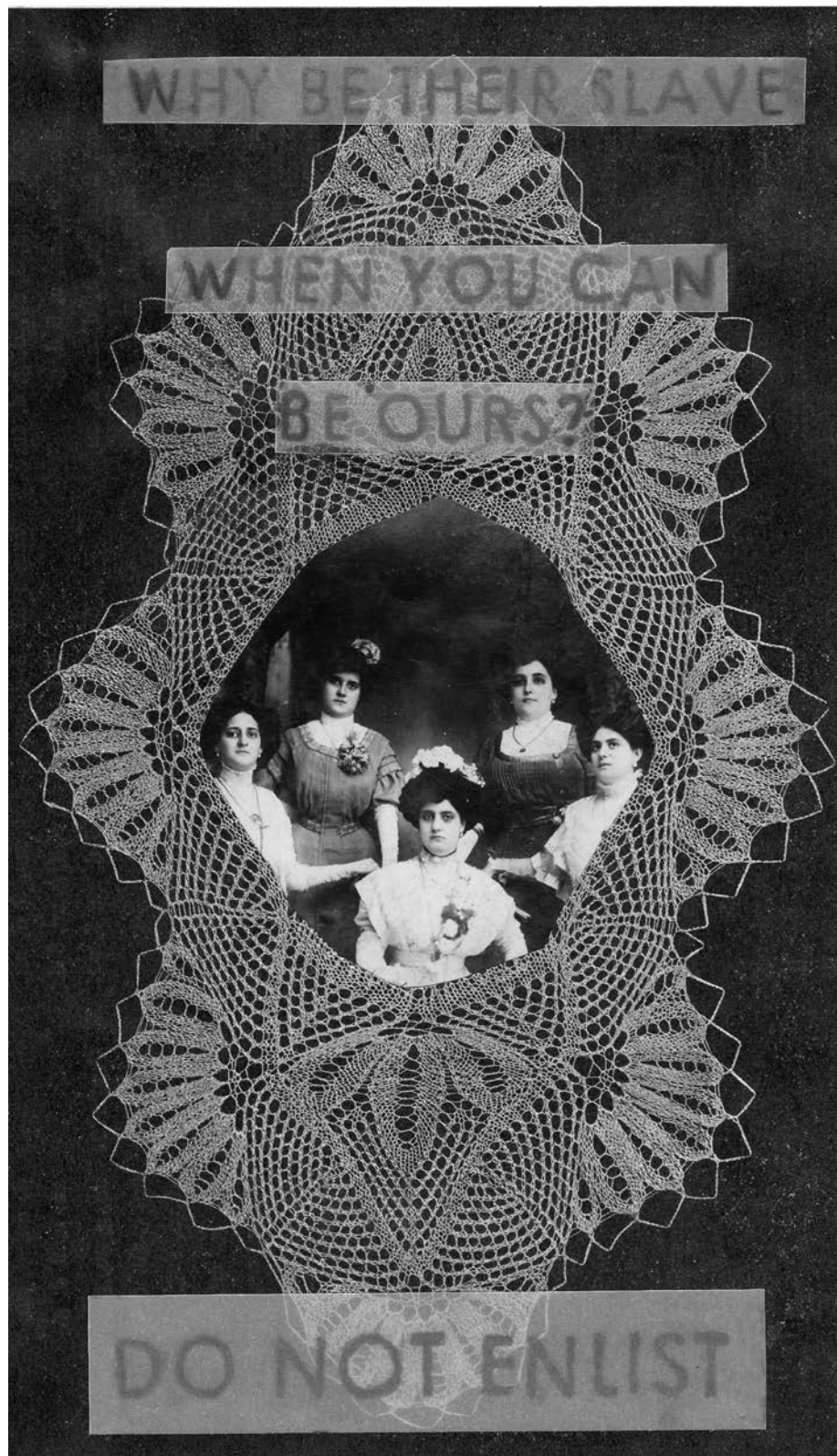




Blueprint with hand-writing (I am I and my circumstance) from The Utopie Folder



Pleita from The Utopie Folder



*Sketch for an anti-conscription poster from
The Utopie Folder*

İz Öztat and Judith Raum

İz Öztat (İÖ)

Judith Raum (JR)

İÖ: I had the privilege of witnessing your research and work around the construction of the Baghdad Railway by the Germans at the beginning of 20th century, which covered the geography from İzmir (over Eskişehir, Konya and Adana) to Bagdad. My first encounter with esparto grass was through you, as you found correspondences that reveal German attempts at planting esparto grass in Anatolia. In what stage in your work and where did you encounter these documents?

JR: At the time I found the respective letters on the introduction of esparto grass into Anatolia, I was looking for information that documented German engagement in Anatolian agricultural land during the railway construction. When visiting the historical archives of Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt/Main a second time in order to trace an information that I had previously found about so-called 'model farms' that German agricultural engineers proposed the board members of the Anatolian Railway Company and Deutsche Bank to build in Anatolia, I found files titled 'cultural trials in Anatolia.' They document several attempts by the German side to enhance Anatolian agriculture and modernize and rationalize cultivation methods by importing German fruits, plants, machines and technology.

These attempts happened between 1895 and 1914 all along the newly built railway line, executed by German agricultural engineers hired by the railway company. Among those documents were letters which showed that the director of Deutsche Bank of the time had obviously been to Spain, had heard about the esparto grass and had the idea to introduce it to Anatolia in order to meet the deforestation problems there and cultivate it as a plant to be used by local home industry.

İÖ: Do you know if the Germans ever succeeded in introducing esparto in Anatolia?

JR: As far as I can tell from the letters I found, they did not. They managed to ship a couple of plants planted in buckets. They had obviously been planted in a non-professional way, crunching the roots so that most of the plants died on the trip already. The test plants were planted in two stations, one of them being Vezirhan, where you and I happened to visit the remains of a former tree nursery. Only a very small numbers of those test plants developed new sprouts at all, the others had obviously all died, and I do not know of any second effort.

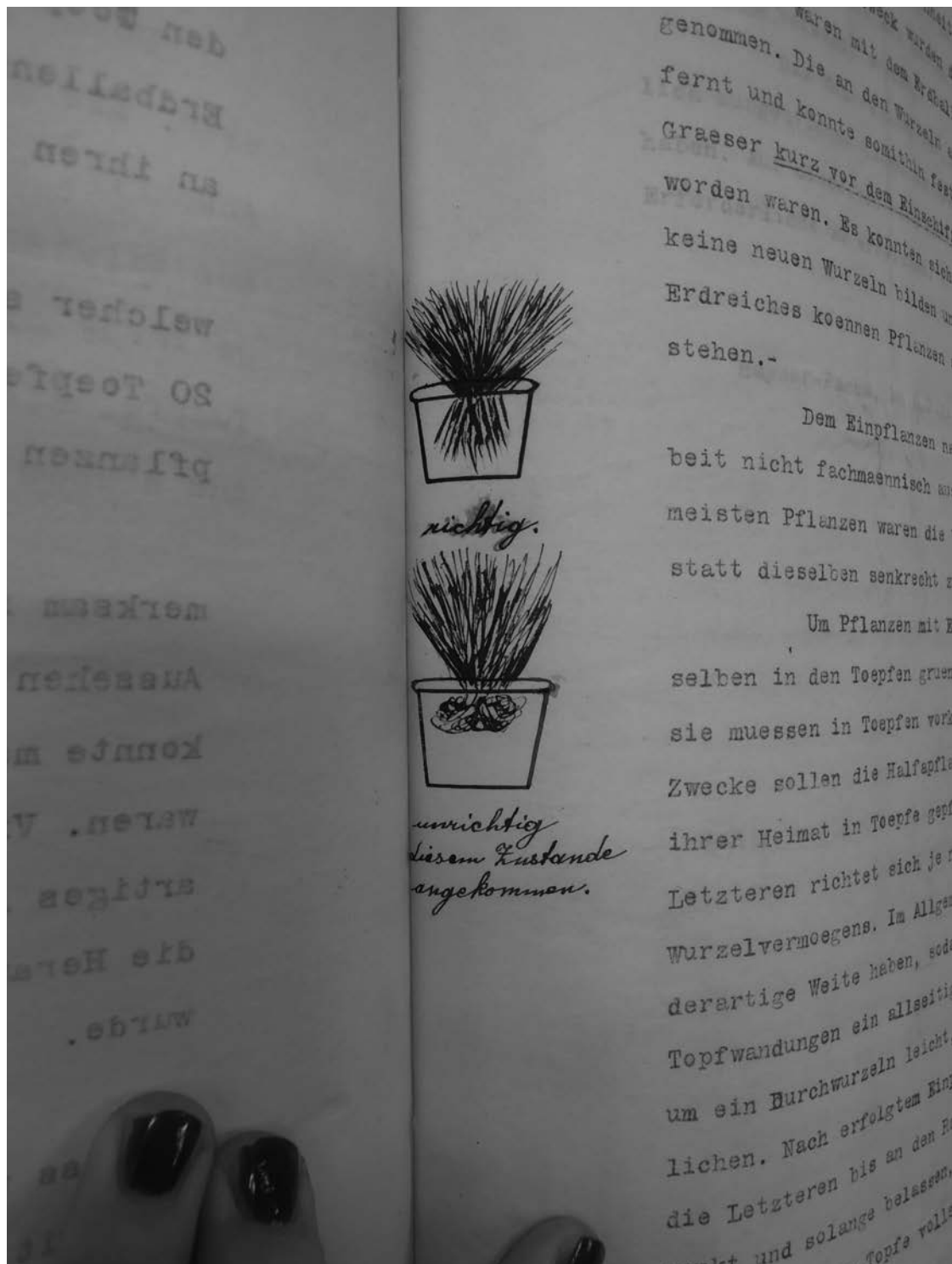
At the same time, the men who had encouraged the test were informed by German Railway personal in Anatolia that there was actually an already existing grass in Anatolia, which the local population was acquainted with and used in quite similar ways as the esparto was used in Spain - for weaving of simple mats, baskets, etc. - so that it began to seem unnecessary if not absurd to introduce the Spanish plant.

İÖ: What is your subjective reading of these documents and how do you see them manifesting in your work?

JR: The series of letters on the esparto grass represents a quite complete cycle of requests, commands, answers and reports, which unfold over the time of more than one year and build up a story that even has some suspense moments. With all the failures and at time absurd expectations they unfold, they are almost comical to read.

For me they are a good example for what was at stake at the time - a great eagerness to make the enterprise of building the railway profitable on all levels (even thinking about what industries and agricultural branches one might have to encourage in Anatolia in order to ensure extra usage of the railway), and at the same time a remarkable talent to oversee or look down on local cultures and traditions.

As they are, they do not yet manifest in my work, for my work tries to appropriate findings such as these documents into a wider narration. I need to add my own language or formulations, be they textual, material or performative, to excerpts from such letters in order to suggest attitudes towards the world which are not merely marked by a will for efficiency, control and exploitation.



Drawings that suggest how and how not to plant esparto grass, on an official correspondance from Judith Raum's archive (Courtesy of the artist)

İz Öztat and Juan Sánchez

İz Öztat (İÖ)

Juan Sánchez (JS)

İÖ: Juan, first of all, I want to thank you for welcoming me to your shop and introducing me to all the materials and processes in it. Esparteria is a shop selling vegetable fibers and products made with them. Can you tell the story of the shop and the business?

JS: This business was started by my grandfather in 1927 and has been at two other locations. My father continued it since 1939 and I took it up 16 years ago. Before, I had worked by helping my father from when I was 12 to when I was 20 while I studied.

İÖ: What items are you selling in the shop? What vegetable fibers as raw material do you sell and where do they come from?

JS: Esparto grass is the foundation of our business, but today its sale is rather minor. I bring it from Murcia, but it is produced in almost the whole southern half of the Iberian Peninsula. The pith is imported from Southeast Asia – from Indonesia, I think. I also work with wicker that comes from the province of Cuenca, pita fiber that comes from Murcia, hemp that is imported and then spun in Aragón and sticks of chestnut wood and hackberry wood that come from Valencia.

İÖ: Are there specific seasons that you purchase the materials? Do you buy them directly from the producers?

JS: We always try to buy them from the producers and jump over as many of the intermediaries as possible. This is what I do with the esparto grass, though with the pith I can't buy a whole container full of merchandise. Why? Always to satisfy a need, whether practical or decorative.

İÖ: You are also selling hand-made objects produced mostly with vegetable fibers. What are the objects you sell and how and where do you buy them?

JS: Though I have the need to adapt to the times and continually change the business (I don't sell the same things as my father and grandfather), I have tried to carry on with products related to my business or to crafts and not to import everything from China like most businesses. For example, I didn't sell faucets/taps and oak barrels before, but when the last business dedicated to that closed, I filled the gap. The same thing with cane webbing for chairs and wicker repair.

İÖ: What techniques do you know for working with the raw materials you sell? How did you learn them? Do you teach anybody?

JS: My father really just sold products. He didn't manufacture anything. He only assembled Persian blinds, for example.

I learned some things on my own, like repairing cane webbing for chairs and some others with help: On holidays, I sometimes got up at 06:00 in the morning to travel 100 km to learn esparto grass-weaving. I wanted to be an esparto grass merchant who didn't just sell but could make my own products.

When someone wants to learn esparto grass-weaving or work with esparto grass, I do like I'm doing with you and don't charge for it. I like that this work is not disappearing. I only charge for the material or the merchandise that are taken. I only ask that they ask me a day in advance so I can make sure the esparto grass is damp.

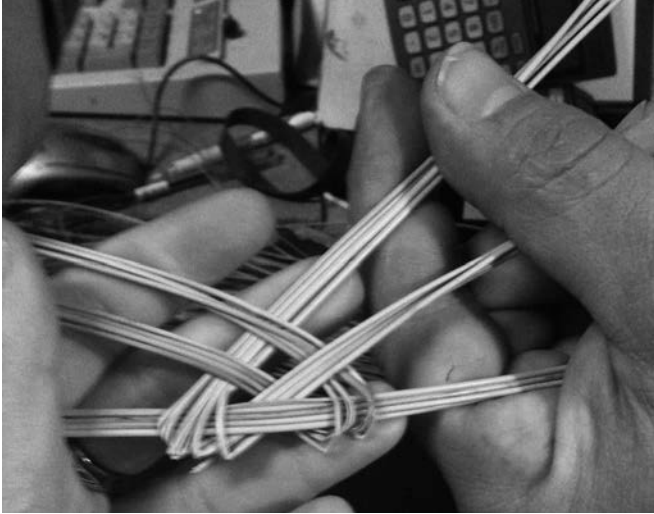
İÖ: What are the qualities of the materials you work with?

JS: I'm not going to lie, I work with the ones that sell. Ultimately, it is a business. But there is a bit of everything, and esparto grass, pith and rattan are elastic and tough. Hackberry wood is hard and rigid. Medula is elastic and resistant to twisting.

İÖ: Who are your costumers? Based on what I could observe during the time I spent in the shop, you act like a connection point between the craftsmen, who buy these raw materials to produce and costumers, who buy the objects crafted with the materials...

JS: Some are individuals who practice crafts as a hobby or to make a little money. Others are decorators or set designers. People who practice martial arts. There are people who need or collect walking canes. All types of people, from the grandfather who needs a cane to the woman who wants to decorate a country house.

İÖ: How do people find you?



How to start a pleita

JS: This has been the traditional street for this type of business. There were coppersmiths, esparto grass sellers, shops of household utensils, furniture and earthenware, wax chandler's shops, merchants of pots and pans, seed sellers, people selling animal intestines to make cold cut meat – everything. The shopkeepers in the towns obtained stock from businesses like mine and in this neighborhood. Some customers come to look for bellows, wineskins or barrels because they used to be sold in these streets. Others are customers from many years ago or who find me with word-of-mouth. There are few customers just passing by.

And now a growing number of people are finding me on the Internet, thanks to my websites, www.esparteria.com and tienda.esparteria.com. This is a new sales channel that does not conflict with traditional business and has marked a turning point: The internet is the best showcase and with some good work on search engine optimization, you can reach more specifically the people who are looking for you.

İÖ: Since this was an inherited family business, do you consider passing it onto your children?

JS: I have a 10-year-old son and on many Saturdays and during the holidays, he comes with me to work. But to tell you the truth, I'm not going to pressure him to follow me into the business. First English, then if he wants he can study for a career that may be technical. Then if he wants, he can continue the business. I quit this business myself for a time. It's possible that he will follow in my footsteps, but I will never force it on him. ¶



Front & Back cover:

Front & Back side of Posthumous Production Series

(Wayward Script I Utopie, 1917-2013, cane webbing, esparto grass)

Thanks

Orton Akıncı, Lara Fresko,
Nazlı Gürlek, Sibel Horada, Kristine Khouri,
Gema Melgar, Olivia Rico, Dilek Winchester,
Manuela Villa,
Burcu Yağız Yançatarol.

Design:

Maya Cohen

This publication is supported by
Matadero Madrid and produced in the
framework of Here Together Now

(January 7th – February 25th 2013)

