

INTERVIEW WITH ART COLLECTORS MR. AND MRS. ELGIZ

BY OLGA TRÖSCHER

THE FOUNDERS OF ELGIZ MUSEUM IN ISTANBUL

“To collect is a pleasure; follow your heart after knowledge”



Sevda & Can Elgiz, painting by Abdurrahman Öztoprak

The Elgiz Museum was founded by collectors Sevda and Can Elgiz as the first contemporary art museum in Turkey in 2001, that occupies a 2000 m² space open to the public. The Museum is situated amongst the high-rise buildings of Istanbul's business district Maslak, within which an open-air terrace of the Museum provides the exhibition platform for sculptors and land-art projects. The Elgiz Museum houses the family's collection and hosts dynamic, avant-garde, and temporary exhibitions and educational programmes. There are many art works of prominent artists in the Museum's collection. In 2013, the IFEMA Amigos de ARCO Madrid presented the Elgiz Collection with the International Collecting Award and in 2014, the Elgiz Museum was awarded with Turkey's Contemporary Arts Foundation Honour Award, specially for this event made by the sculptor Mehmet Aksoy. As of 2015, the Elgiz Museum is a founding member of the Global Private Museum Network and a member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

Olga Tröschler: How did you start collecting art?

Mrs. Elgiz: My husband (Can Elgiz) is an architect, he studied architecture at university. His family were also collectors. When we got married, experiencing art became our hobby and we started visiting exhibitions and meeting serious collectors. At the time, there were only one or two galleries in Istanbul and nobody was really exhibiting contemporary art. Artists were producing contemporary works, but there were not enough galleries, that that exhibited their works. We started with Turkish contemporary art and at the same time started visiting international art fairs in the 90s. We started to enrich our collection with works of international artists since then, that led to an international art collection.

O.T. Were you always interested in contemporary art?

Mrs. Elgiz: I was always interested in contemporary art. This interest has been growing ever since, as it cultivates the drive for collecting. We have always appreciated contemporary art and we have been sharing this passion for collecting for many years.



Elgiz Museum entrance

We both value the power of art, its ability to widen perspectives and to encourage alternative ways of communication.

O.T. What was your first art work which you acquired and when it happened?

Mrs. Elgiz: It was in the 80s, an abstract geometric painting by the pioneer artist Abdurrahman Öztoprak. This piece actually has been the starting point of our collection. It affected the way we started to collect, as it was purely for the sake of art, not for investment purposes.



Elgiz Museum, Permanent Collection, From L to R: Abdurrahman Öztoprak, Tony Cragg, Adnan Çoker, Jonathan Meese. Photo Kayhan Kaygusuz

O.T. What are the most important works in your collection?

Mrs. Elgiz: It's quite difficult to categorize 'the most important artworks', as each of them has its story and a different aspect of importance. The collection consists of the works of many prominent artists, who played important role in shaping contemporary art itself, and some artworks become more relevant within time, according to changing social or cultural phenomena.

O.T. Do you have works of Austrian artists in Elgiz Museum?

Mrs. Elgiz: The Austrian artists in our Collection are: Erwin Wurm, Elke Krystūfek and Lea Asja Pagenkemper. In 2017 The Elgiz Museum also collaborated with the Austrian Culture Office in Istanbul. The curator of the exhibition titled 'Leaden Circles Dissolved in the Air' was Ferhat Ozgur and on this occasion, the Austrian artist, Tanja Boukal, was invited to show her works in Istanbul for the first time.

O.T. How did you get the idea to open Elgiz Museum? What was the motivation?

Mrs. Elgiz: We have been passionate about contemporary art whole life. In fact, we have been living with contemporary art since the 80s, in our gardens and our interiors. We did not want to store away artworks, we believe that artworks should be shared and experienced. In the meantime the collection was constantly growing. We came to a point, where this accumulation evolved itself to a non-profit institution to show and share the art we own with the public. Therefore, appeared other chances of collaborations as well as public involvement. This was at a time, when con-

temporary art museums did not exist, so, in that sense, the museum pioneered in the act of supporting contemporary art.

O.T. How long did it take you to build the Museum?

Mrs. Elgiz: In 2001, we decided to open what we called, an "experimental" museum in a building, designed and constructed by my husband. The space, that was called Proje4L, hosted many conceptual exhibitions. It became a model for other collectors; from the beginning, we always thought, that supporting artists is not only about buying their works, but about making these works visible; more of a continuous support, rather than a consumption. Eventually, Proje 4L became Elgiz Museum, as it was re-located to Maslak in 2004, where it houses the Elgiz Collection and temporary collaboration exhibitions. We thought our mission was accomplished, as major foundations with big budgets followed suit and began supporting Turkish artists.

O.T. What is the difference between having a private collection and a private Museum?

Mrs. Elgiz: Having a private museum allows for the works to be viewed by a very wide audience. The Elgiz Museum is a private museum and it is a non-profit institution, that aims to embrace all, who are passionate about art. The museum's educational programme, that includes workshops and museum tours, allows us to evaluate the importance of providing this space, because a wide range of children and adults engage themselves with the works. The private nature of the museum allows liberation in terms of the content of our exhibition and activities' programme as well.

O.T. Do you prefer to buy art works at the galleries or at the art fairs, or perhaps directly from the artists?

Mrs. Elgiz: We prefer to buy either from galleries or auctions, as well as international art fairs.

O.T. Do you always decide yourself, which art work to acquire or do you sometimes ask the opinion of the art consultant?

Mrs. Elgiz: The characteristics of our collection is eclectic, and, as we share this passion as a family, it is possible to trace each member's own taste in the collection. We have always had pleasure in reading and researching about art, that allowed us to develop a powerful insight of our own.

O.T. When you choose the new art work for your collection, are you led by your intuition or more by intellect?

Mrs. Elgiz: It is possible to say both, because we are led by intuition, that is supported by intellect; the two aspects are complimenting each other in a way.



Elgiz Museum Permanent Collection, from L to R Liam Gillick, David Salle, Gilbert&George, David Salle

O.T. Would you say, collecting has changed your life?

Mrs. Elgiz: Perhaps yes, because it takes an important amount of time, and it is a serious occupation. In addition to the social engagement and its outcomes, it has also eventually been a responsibility for us, in a way. Other than that, the dialogue is ever-lasting, as there are always more artworks to see, to discover, and to discuss.

O.T. How many art works are in Elgiz Museum and what are the highlights of the Museum?

Mrs. Elgiz: We believe, that the number is not important, what matters is the quality! The variations change, so, the numbers are always different both at home and the museum. When we acquire a new piece of art, we like to see it at home before publicly exhibiting it at the museum. It is a very personal connection, that we like to enjoy very much.

The recently acquired Erwin Wurm's sculpture is definitely a highlight, as well as the Chiharu Shiota piece. Among other highlights we could mention the works of Barbara Kruger, Gilbert&George, Wolfgang Tillmans (which is also a recent acquisition) and Cindy Sherman.



10th Terrace Exhibition: From Another Hill, photo by Kayhan Kaygusuz' instead of 'Başka bir Tepeden 10. Teras Sergisi, Fotoğraf Kayhan Kaygusuz

O.T. Could you please tell more about collaborations with different art institutions and curators.

Mrs. Elgiz: We collaborate with international cultural institutions, for example, at the moment, we have an exhibition, that was realized in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut, entitled 'Resource Utopia', curated by Andreas Rost, Michael Biedowicz and Volkan Kızıltunc. It is an exhibition, that interprets utopia, as a possible resource, and questions its dystopic outcomes. Another collaboration was with the Austrian Culture Office last year, the exhibition was curated by the artist Ferhat Ozgur. The Austrian artist, Tanja Boukal, was invited for a group show at the Museum with Chulayarnnon Siriphol and local artists.

O.T. What influence does your collection have on the new generation, do you hope?

Mrs. Elgiz: We host curated group shows and aim to continue our collaborations with international cultural institutions in order to continue our mission to show local art on a global scale and to enable a visible dialogue between the artistic intellect and its possible audience in Istanbul. The Collection continues to grow and the Elgiz Museum continues to host dynamic exhibitions, such as the open-air Terrace Exhibitions, where sculpture works by more than 20 emerging artists are exhibited every



summer. We hope, that the new generation is inspired by engagements as such, and, we hope, that the dialogue expands with new support and perspectives.

O.T. What advice would you give to the young collectors that would like to start their own collection?

Mrs. Elgiz: Be always enthusiastic and follow art events, exhibitions and publications. It is very important to read different insights and to follow actively. To collect is a pleasure; follow your heart after knowledge.