

Interview with Hanne Lise Thomsen for Art Dog

In-Between Design Platform

1. Dear Hanne Lise, can you please tell us about Billboard Istanbul 2020? How did you develop the idea and what will the audience in Istanbul see during the two weeks in October?
2. Gender and identity are two hot topics discussed globally. How do you handle this subject in your project?
3. You have completed similar projects in 2015, Casablanca and 2012, Ramallah. What were the main accomplishments of these projects? How did you transfer your learnings to your current project in Istanbul?
4. Your art practice is very much influenced by the architecture and urban life. How do you translate these into your projects?
5. Right now, violence against women is a big discussion topic in Turkey. How could art in general contribute to a more inclusive and peaceful society?
6. Even in art which is expected to be a more open minded field, women are underrepresented. How could this be overcome?
7. In a global world, we have the privilege to learn from various cultures. How do you aim to strengthen the cultural exchange between Denmark and Turkey with Billboard Istanbul 2020 project?

1. My work as an visual artist focuses on creating a dialogue with the surrounding society, using urban spaces as a platform for site-specific, temporary projects, commenting on contemporary issues – social as well as political. My primary approach is processual, with a lot of co-creators along the way. For me as a female artist who started out in the 1970s, the relatively high level of gender equality in Scandinavia has played a major role. Equal rights are essential if women are to navigate freely in their own lives and in society. My projects have always had a strong focus on gender, equality and diversity.

In 2003 I launched my first billboard project in Copenhagen, with the participation of 100 female artists from all the Nordic countries. It felt obvious to continue the collaboration I had established, and I was very curious whether it would be possible to expand this network to other countries. In that way we could build bridges between cultures and challenge our ideas about urban space, gender and identity through artistic interventions and new kinds of images by and of women.

The street art project BILLBOARD ISTANBUL 2020 aims to present contemporary art to a wider audience and thus open up a public debate about

gender issues. I think its a very strong statement that women artists of all ages and perspectives are showing their work in the public space.

2. My goal is to tell stories through images that disrupt the commercial ad space which is dominating the streets of many cities worldwide. The project offers women the opportunity to express themselves on their own terms with the intention to make the city a source of creative inspiration for everyone.

3. Gathering and exhibiting the art of 115 Turkish, Moroccan and Nordic contemporary female artists as well as selected students from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts in Istanbul brings a very special dynamic and vital character to the project. My experience from previous projects is that diversity is a strength and together we are much stronger.

4. My work and projects primarily focus on a dialogue with the surrounding society and the metropolis provides the platform for many of my projects. The complexity of cityscapes with their constantly changing atmosphere and multifaceted architectural spaces is a key starting point and source of inspiration that guides the overall choreography of each individual project. Billboards have a powerfull and strong visibility in the public space and they are therefore an ideal medium for a project that wants to establish new experiences of women, gender and art.

In Istanbul I have chosen to work in Beyoglu, Sisly, Besikats and Kadikoy and I have chosen billboards that can be experienced up close by pedestrians. All of our billboards are located in the midst of conventional advertising. This presents something of a challenge, but one we are prepared to take on.

5. Art and culture can help us create positive change by making us see the world in a new way and understand current issues, giving them voices and images in public space. Telling stories and creating a space for dialogue and activism is a way of influencing society.

6. I hope that my project BILLBOARD ISTANBUL 2020 will contribute to focusing on the issue of women and art and the importance of a more equal gender representation and contribute to establishing a more versatile art scene for everyone.

7. After this major undertaking of establishing contact with a large group of talented and skilled Turkish female artists I feel confident that our collaboration will continue, communicating with each other through images and new billboard projects – and I hope Moscow will be next stop.

<http://hannelisethomsen.com/>