

BY JENNIFER HATTAM

# Sibel Horada

## What's lost and left behind

The recent removal of outdoor seating at bars and restaurants throughout Istanbul's lively Beyoğlu district has prompted heated outcry, but some street chairs remain sacrosanct, according to local artist Sibel Horada.



› Spoon, 2007



› Impressions from the beech forest, 2010



› Topuz, 2011



› Urban knights, 2007



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With tattered upholstery and missing arms, they sit next to fruit stands, in front of doorways, beneath trees, and in the middle of parking spaces – high-backed wooden seats, sofas, benches, plastic stools, and wheeled office chairs.

“They are old chairs that used to live inside, in good houses, and have been discarded but then taken up by other people,” said Horada, who shot photographs of 80 such seats for an installation piece she calls “Urban Knights”.

“The chairs are like street cats, there is a sacredness to them in Istanbul; no one touches them,” she said. “I think of the chairs as guardians of urban life in a way.”

To display the photos, Horada set up an antique button-tufted sofa next to an old slide projector. “The sound and physical object of the projector was important to me. I don’t see this as photography; to me it’s a sculpture,” she said, explaining that her art practice as a sculptor includes finding and photographing objects as well as crafting them.

The green sofa from “Urban Knights” sits in her tidy but drafty studio, shared with a handful of other artists in the Galata neighborhood. Though the area is rapidly gentrifying, Horada’s street is still tradesmen territory, with a lampshade maker upstairs, a storage depot downstairs, and an electrical-supply store across the way. When she won a spot in a marble sculpture workshop, some of the local craftsmen gave her an introduction to the unfamiliar material.

The maquette for that marble piece – an oversized spoon holding a “scoop” of grass – sits on one windowsill in Horada’s studio, which she said was emptier than usual because she had just moved out her latest piece, “Topuz,” for display at the Contemporary Istanbul art fair. Resembling a medieval mace with a ball-shaped head made of hair, it plays on the double meaning of the Turkish word, which can refer to both the weapon and the chignon hairstyle.

High on the studio wall hangs a panoramic photo of a beech tree forest that Horada took down to show a guest, explaining she made it during a residency in the Black Sea town of Bolu. “I went out into the forest, chose a point from which to rotate and then made plaster-and-cloth impressions of the closest trees within that radius,” she said. The photograph documents the

numbers Horada placed on the trees so as to arrange their impressions in the same order in the gallery.

“When I studied the Impressionists in school, it wasn’t very interesting,” she admitted. “But working on this piece, I felt the excitement they must have felt being outside. One day there would be snow, then rain, the next day huge mushrooms...”

For “As If It Never Existed,” Horada tracked down the remains of a tree that had been uprooted from Yıldız Technical University, where she is completing her master’s degree. She draws a connection between the broken tree pieces, which she exhibited as a gallery installation, and abandoned towns and churches across Anatolia. “When people are made to leave, like an uprooted tree, the land is scarred,” she said. —