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THE DESIGNER'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT,
USING SAVAŞ ÇEKİÇ AS A MODEL

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*They always say time changes things,
but you actually have to change them yourself.*

Andy Warhol¹

When we consider that a society is a living organism in the sociological sense, the graphic designer monitors the process within the system, utilises its details, and solves problems. The message that the designer wants to give society in terms of sustainability and environmental sensitivity is intended to reach the target audience through the medium of design. In line with today's changing needs, the designer contributes to a sustainable lifestyle through their contemporary and creative attitude. The artist leads social change in terms of environmental awareness. As Warhol put it, "They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

We all owe an immeasurable debt to the planet we live on and have individual responsibilities to it. Graphic designers need to determine their place in the system as problem-solving creators and take their share of this responsibility by taking up an ethical stance when dealing with employers and customers.

SAVAŞ ÇEKİÇ

Savaş Çekiç was born in Turkey in 1960. He graduated from the Department of Graphic Design in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Mimar Sinan University in 1984. A professional graphic designer and illustrator, Çekiç works from his own studio, Savaş Çekiç Design, established in 1987, and specialises in packaging, corporate identity, publishing, and book design and illustration as well as posters, brochures, catalogues, annual reports, calendars and prospectuses. He is the owner and art director of the magazine *No Design*, specialising in the field of social design. He acted as a design consultant for the Theatres of Greater Metropolitan Istanbul, being responsible for the design of all the theatres' visual materials between 1995 and 1997. He served as a member of the board of directors of the Turkish Association of Graphic Designers from 1996 to 1997. He has been an instructor in design at the Department of Graphic Arts in the School of Fine Arts at Marmara University since 1997.

Since 2009, Çekiç has been in charge of design consultancy for the Bakırkoy Municipal Theatres in Istanbul and is responsible for the design of their visual materials. Çekiç's work has been represented in major museums such as the Lahti Museum, the Ogaki Museum, the Dansk Plakat Museum and the Zurich Poster Museum. His poster designs have been shown in

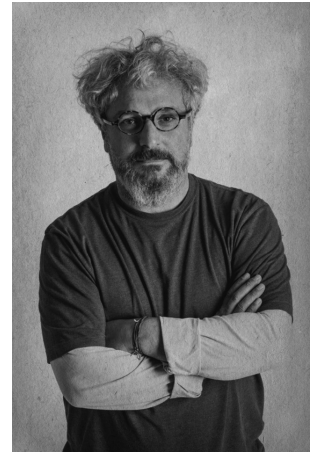


Figure 1. Savaş Çekiç,
artist photo.

<http://savascckicdesign.com/biyografi>.

many solo and group exhibitions in Turkey and also in biennials and triennials worldwide. His work has won him many national and international awards and he has been published in renowned graphic design magazines including *Graphis*, *Novum* and *Grafik Tasanm-Turkey*. In 2010, he acted as curator and director of the 1st Marmara University International Invitational Poster Biennial.²

The most significant feature of Savaş Çekiç's productions is the direct reflection of his conception of the world and his thoughts about events in his work. Even his political commitments may be discerned in his designs. Posters with political and social themes, often reflecting his own political preferences, hold an important place among his designs (Figures 2-7).

THE INTERVIEW

I was privileged to interview Çekiç about sustainability, environmental awareness and design.

N. Salur: What are your thoughts on design and ecodesign for a sustainable life?

S. Çekiç: As a priority, we need to produce designs that are suitable for the existing ecological system, do not threaten life and meet human needs in harmony with nature; design for sustainable living should be the aim. This is an inevitable fact at the point we have reached. If we do not pay enough attention to this situation, biological life on earth will disappear at an irreversible speed. The balance of nature is deteriorating rapidly. Taking account of climate change alone, a small increase of two degrees in average temperatures will be enough to upset the balance of life on our planet. We are faced with serious chaos. Even this situation does not seem to be dire enough for human beings to stop their insatiable greed for production and consumption.

While this is the case, of course, good design becomes increasingly important. Maybe it is better not to design, to be content with existing designs. At this point, it is necessary to make the correct diagnosis. The main source of all these problems is the endless gluttony of capitalism. Mankind is about to succumb to the system it has created.

Design is one of the main building blocks of this system. Designers now have to choose a side. They will either be on the side of the System or biological life. In my opinion, if a designer chooses in favour of biological life, he must quickly move away from the system. There is no other option.

N. Salur: In the process of a graphic design from brief to delivery, what is the designer's role in environmentally responsible design?

S. Çekiç: No design can be environment friendly; one can only do relatively less damage. Unfortunately, we cannot produce any design without exploiting the world's limited resources. A design can be produced in the name of imagination, but when it comes to execution, finite resources are required. Of course, if the designer is environmentally aware, he would absolutely plump for the least polluting option. But even this choice cannot save him from guilt.

N. Salur: How do you evaluate the attitudes of companies employing graphic designers in our country (Turkey) towards the environment? Do you think that companies have reached a sufficient level of awareness of the concept of a sustainable environment?

S. Çekiç: As a result of globalisation and brutal capitalism, all local firms in our country have either been amalgamated or cooperate with existing global firms. Observe how sensitive companies in America or Europe are on the issue of sustainability – companies in our country are equally responsive. They all seem to be very sensitive, but it's just for show. Sincere sensitivity on this issue would result in an immediate halt to existing production and starting to produce goods only to meet the real needs of human beings. Such a company does not exist, either in our country or in other countries.

N. Salur: What is proportion of graphic design in Turkey reflects approaches such as “environmentally sensitive design” and “sustainable design,” and is this sufficient? Do you think such work is effective in raising awareness? Do you think that this design approach can be realistically applied within the capitalist system?

S. Çekiç: When we look at the role of the designer, many productions are made in the name of environmental sensitivity. But not all of these are socially focused – rather they reflect intellectual activity. It is a phenomenon that does not go beyond the Facebook project, where the producer shows off his creativity and expands his portfolio. It's not realistic at all. Unfortunately, when such activities fail to take on flesh and bones, they cannot go beyond showing off.

There is no real demand for action. Nobody cares about the state of our planet; life goes on, our bad habits continue. No one intends giving up their existing living standards. I no longer have faith the possibility of change in this area.

N. Salur: From the consumer's point of view, do you think this type of design will influence consumer choice? In other words, will the consumer turn to these types of products on the supposition that they will not harm nature?

S. Çekiç: There is no demand from consumers for this. Would the world look like this if there were consumers who made conscious choices? Capitalism could not ignore the demands of the consumer and naturally would have to be more sensitive on this issue – but producers are not faced with such demands.

N. Salur: What is the responsibility of the graphic designer to prevent damage to the environment and reduce negative impacts on a world which is rapidly changing and rapidly depleting natural resources?

S. Çekiç: I am speaking for all design disciplines when I say that we should stop designing. At the very least we should try to be personally conscious consumers. In general, we have to spread effective propaganda in order to develop this conscious consumer profile.

N. Salur: Do you think that the campaigns that seek to raise awareness of environmental sensitivity in our country are achieving their goals with respect to their target audiences?

S. Çekiç: There are no such activities. Those that exist are total eyewash.

N. Salur: Considering graphic designers, in addition to their aesthetic concerns, how should they use their materials in the service of environmentally friendly design?

S. Çekiç: The least polluting materials should be chosen. Go for reclaimed materials whenever possible and choose the cheapest design. Aim to benefit from the power of design and creativity, not physical materials. It is possible to benefit from all the possibilities offered by nature without reducing the quality of life.³

CONCLUSION

Today, the damage caused by human beings to the environment and the destructive consequences of this damage have underlined the need for precautionary action in many areas. In today's world, where industrial production is occurring at an accelerating pace, many industries are producing 'waste mountains' in both cities and rural areas. Disposal of household waste without separation and recycling is a leading problem in developing societies. Much of the work undertaken by voluntary organisations concerned about environmental degradation and the future of the planet has failed to achieve its purpose. As in many areas, the level of awareness shown by societies around the globe on environmental issues leaves much to be desired, again leading to failure.



Figure 2. Savaş Çekiç,
poster, 2017.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CXISo17gmF>.



Figure 3. Savaş Çekiç,
poster, 2017.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CYbZtgEAYhe>.



Figure 4. Savaş Çekiç,
*My White Body is
a Dark Stain – Thanks to You*, 2010.
<http://savasekicdesign.com/portfolio/my-white-body-is-a-dark-stain-thanks-to-you>.



Figure 5. Savaş Çekiç,
Isin-ma!, War-ming!, 2008.

A series of posters designed to draw attention to global warming.
<http://savasekicdesign.com/portfolio/isin-ma>,



Figure 6. Savaş Çekiç,
Isin-ma!, War-ming!, 2008.

A series of posters designed to draw attention to global warming.
<http://savasekicdesign.com/portfolio/isin-ma>,



Figure 7. Savaş Çekiç,
Isin-ma!, War-ming!, 2008.

A series of posters designed to draw attention to global warming.
<http://savasekicdesign.com/portfolio/isin-ma>,

Non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace and WWF are trying to attract attention to the dire state of the planet by protesting about numerous environmental issues. The main problem is that their activism is failing to reach all segments of society and the solutions they offer are sidelined due to political and economic conflicts of interest. These and other movements advocating for the future of the planet should be supported and the level of social awareness raised across the board so that each individual becomes an activist for environmental sensitivity.

As Çekiç notes, it is possible to benefit from all the possibilities offered by nature without reducing our quality of life. However, this will only happen if sustainability and recycling are included in all areas of life. Beginning at the highest levels, all sectors should aim to follow serious environmental policies, striving not to overload the agreed sustainability framework in all production stages. Only in this way can a livable environment be left for future generations to enjoy.

Today, as natural resources are rapidly running out, and in concert with global social economic and cultural changes, the graphic designer can play an important role in preventing damage to the environment, in sustaining the planet and reducing our negative impacts on it, thus creating a sustainable environment. To further these goals, industry and educational institutions should come up with projects that will create environmental awareness and keep it alive. As Victor Papanek advocates, environmental awareness can be created in society by means of such projects.⁴ The poster series designed by Çekiç in 2017 draws attention to the damage caused by microplastics that threaten all living organisms (Figures 2-3).

Producers who have adopted environmental awareness and sustainability as leading principles work to ensure that their products are environmentally friendly, and frequently use text with environmental themes in their products. It is the graphic designer who is charged with presenting and introducing the product to the consumer. Thus the graphic designer should raise the consumer's environmental awareness by producing creative ideas, as well as offering manufacturers ideas that enhance company policies on sustainability. In terms of sustainability, producing without causing environmental degradation should be the primary goal of designers.

Nilgün Salur (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9621-1643>) was born in Polatlı, Turkey, in 1970. She graduated from the Graphic Arts Department, Fine Arts Faculty, Anadolu University, in 1991 and completed a Masters's degree in the Graphic Arts Department, Social Sciences Institute, Anadolu University, in 1995. She completed a doctorate in the Fine Arts Department, Social Sciences Institute, at Kocaeli University in 2014. In 2020 she received the Eskişehir Art Association's Art Award (Graphic Section). She is an associate professor in the Graphic Arts Department, School for the Handicapped, at Anadolu University.

1 https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/andy_warhol_109768 (accessed 30 May 2022).

2 "Biyografi," *Savaş Çekiç Design Studio*, <http://savascekicdesign.com/biyografi> (accessed 30 May, 2022).

3 Nilgün Salur, "Graphic Design in Terms of Sustainability and Recycling" (PhD thesis, Plastic Arts Department, Kocaeli University Institute of Social Sciences, 2014), 66, 157-60.

4 Victor Papanek, *Design For The Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*, 2nd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985).