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[Episode 17 Mau-mau Works](#) (April 2015)

Transcript by Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Sine Ergun – **SE**

Naz Cugouglu – **NC**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Today, I'm in fucking Asia. Amazing. My guests today are Sine and Naz and together, they run

MauMau artists' residency centre here in Istanbul. Sine is the founder and Naz is the programme leader. Hello, you two. We'll start by asking about Mau Mau, how it runs, how it started and why. We'll start with Sine.

SE: The idea of MauMau actually was based on my experiences in an artists' residency programme in New York. When I came back, I thought an artists' residency programme in Istanbul was a necessity because it is created for artists just to produce, in my work especially, built on this context. I just wanted a residency in which I would like to be an artist. So, we created the design of the building, decided how long would be the artists' residency. It's been three years now and we've really enjoyed MauMau.

DT: Do you have a lot of support locally from residents? Is the centre well received by the people in the local area?

NC: We have very good relations with our neighbours in general, but as Sine always says, it took some time and struggle to build that relationship. At the end, we feel they support us a lot.

DT: What were the problems? Was it that people didn't understand what you were trying to do?

NC: People didn't understand what an artist residency is. Interestingly, also the artists in Turkey in the beginning didn't understand what an art residency is. It was the biggest struggle. There are many examples, we had Karaman Sular before that, they closed a year ago and Halka Art. But there are a few. Comparing the population of Istanbul and its importance in the arts scene in the world, artists' residencies are very few.

It was the biggest struggle because we host artists, we have exhibitions, artists from visual-arts background, we have writers. We live together, we work together, we produce together, so this context actually is not very common here.

DT: I've only been here less than a week and it seems quite an unusual project. Most cities I've visited in Europe, these kinds of organisations are all over the place. At the opening of the exhibition on Saturday, a lot of people had travelled from different parts of the city. There seemed to be an energy drawing people in and it seemed like it was an unusual thing to be happening, to be having an artists' residency program here.

SE: It is an unusual thing because the artists produce in Istanbul so you can directly see the effect of the experience they had in MauMau, in Istanbul in general. The artworks are kind of shaped in that sense and it takes too much attention because of it, not only on the Turkish arts scene, but international arts. It takes attention.

I guess that's the reason, because we are offering something, for instance, Elizabeth [Kristensen] and Elisa's [Pieper] works might be only seen in Istanbul once or twice, or three times. It's not that Turkish artists have an exhibition almost in a year. It's something unusual you would see once and that's it.

DT: I'd like to talk more specifically about the writing programmes that happen at MauMau. Maybe Naz could tell us a bit more about how they work and how people apply.

NC: We have our application deadlines. We get the applications from writers, we go over the applications and we choose some of the writers, depending on the portfolios, CVs and everything. Then they come, they stay now for two weeks, but at the beginning of the next period, next autumn, they are going to stay for six weeks.

What they do is work on their writing mostly, so they do whatever they want. We don't pressure our artists or writers, so if they want to do anything, they do it. Depending on their needs, we have reading sessions so they can share what they have been writing in Istanbul with the audience. We have open-microphone events, we just began. We are thinking of keeping on doing that so people can mingle with each other and share what they've been writing.

DT: I get the impression the writing programmes are quite sociable. It's nice they combine with the art side as well, because it could be quite a lonely experience, travelling to Istanbul and being holed up in a room, writing for three weeks. It does seem people at MauMau are encouraged, not forced, to mingle with the artists in the programme, but also local artists in Istanbul as well. Do you see the writing programmes carrying on in the format they are in or will they develop any more? Are you happy with the outcome so far?

SE: The basic idea is to be flexible as much as possible for the artists and writers. We try to shape our six weeks in terms of their needs. Now we have started with open microphone, the next step might be a constant relationship with Turkish writers. It might be nice to have a common meeting. I don't know how it would work.

Of course, with literature, the border is always language. That's the dilemma we face. But somehow, we will try to have some common ground with Turkish writers together with our writers. The most important thing is to be as flexible as possible. It's the same with the artists' programme. If the artists prefer not to have an exhibition, it should be OK.

If the writer wants to be locked in his or her room for six weeks, it should be OK. It is created for the artists to be more fruitful.

DT: We might have a reading now and we will begin with a poem from Naz.

[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time.]

DT: Thank you very much. Next, I'd like to talk about your writing, individually. Rather than me pretending to know, maybe you should just start yourselves. Since you just read the poem, Naz, maybe you could begin and tell us how you write.

NC: So I have taken some classes at university, like creative writing, memoir, story-writing, poetry. If I feel I have something to tell that I can't really stick on any of these ways of telling it, mostly I feel myself coming to poems somehow. I have some inspiration about that,

especially my poetry teacher at the university, Julie Doxey, I kept on coming back to her books, looking at them and creating an idea.

An idea comes to my mind and I begin to tell it, I feel like I am telling a story, I let it go somehow and I don't know where it's going to take me. It's a fantasy world for me. I don't know where I'm going.

DT: You allow the narrative to guide you.

NC: Yes.

DT: And Sine?

SE: It's the hardest thing to talk about, your writing, isn't it? It all started with a decision. I decided to write, first poems and plays, beginning 2010 or 2008, I don't know. I started to write short stories. It's the hardest thing to talk about!

DT: What you write is enough information because you're going to read a short story today, rather than poetry.

SE: I can talk about the structure of my short stories. I try to keep it as simple as possible, as short as possible. It might be called minimalism.

DT: Your English is very good, but there is also an issue here of being descriptive about your own work in your second language.

SE: I don't think it's possible in another language.

DT: I'm not trying to put you too much on the spot, you've explained quite nicely. This is probably going to be an awful question too, but how do you see your own writing developing? Are you happy with the style continuing as it is? Do you have any goals for your writing?

SE: Now I am writing my next book, I push myself into more abstract writing instead of realist. It's been hard, but also fruitful process for me. Somehow, I would like to talk about more, not political but social things, in a non-direct way, a hidden way. So abstract writing fits in that context very well.

DT: So using more symbolism?

SE: Yes. In the beginning, I wasn't at all.

NC: I am trying to discipline myself more, especially being very close to Sine. I am trying to learn a little bit from her, making writing more part of your life somehow. It is sometimes hard for a writer writing in the middle, in the centre of her writing, especially when you are working in a place where you need to be socialising a lot. It's hard to close yourself. It's hard to write with all those people, you need some space for yourself. It's hard to create. I am still

trying to work on that somehow. I write in English, I sometimes write in Turkish, I'm still having language-decision problems.

DT: Do you write in English or translate from Turkish?

NC: I write in English. I also wrote a poem about that. I like the distance I put between writing in another language. I like that distance. With Turkish, it's too personal.

DT: Your poem is quite fantasy-based. Do you think it would be difficult to explore that fantasy world in Turkish? Is it easier in English?

NC: Yes. It's more distant. You can go to that distant world more easily with that distant language.

DT: I've heard how hard it is to translate from Turkish to English anyway. I have a terrible problem when I'm translating into Turkish!

NC: How it sounds is totally different. It's hard to catch the rhythms.

DT: We're going to have our second reading from Sine and this time, we'll hear some Turkish rhythms.

[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time.]

Thank you, Sine. I'm sure that was lovely. The sound was really nice. I'm going to have to find out what that was about, I'm intrigued now. Sine was reading from her book, what's it called?

SE: Life Sometimes, or *Bazan Hayat* in Turkish.

DT: I like that, Life Sometimes. As I always say, both full names and the name of the book and any blogs and links to MauMau will be in the description of this video. We won't dwell on the finer details that will be listed because if I try to say them, you won't understand anyway. What have the influences over your writing been? We can start with Naz.

NC: As I told you, my professor Julie Doxey, I love her so much and I love her writing. She is a great inspiration for me. I am feeling I'm getting inspired a lot by Sine, just being around her, the way she writes, the way she thinks, she is a great inspiration for me. In my life, I can't really stick on one thing. I can't stick on only one writer. I keep experiencing and finding out new writers as much as I can.

I always get recommendations from people I like, so they can suggest the good ones. Mostly, I have been reading what Sine has been suggesting. It's better if she can mention some names.

DT: And yourself, any influences over your work?

SE: Influences, I don't know. I like to read Raymond Carver, [INAUDIBLE] Hernandez. Recently, I have discovered Faulkner. Sait Faik, a Turkish writer. Katherine Mansfield and Truman Capote.

NC: A Turkish writer, Haldun Taner. Also, Borges, Cortázar, great ones.

DT: I normally ask what writers would recommend for listeners to check out, but it would be nice if we could talk about MauMau. Is there anyone who's passed through that you think people should check out?

SE: So many! Ernesto Klar, I guess. We also showed his work on contemporary Istanbul. He has a dust project, collecting dust from all over the world. He is going to have an exhibition in New York next year. He is a performing/media writer.

I guess Camila Alegria from Chile, she works on installation, very mixed media because she also has paintings, but how she installs them together has the whole picture and meaning. We had her exhibition on in September, together with Veronica [INAUDIBLE]. There are so many, more than 50 artists.

DT: Usually, with these shorter podcasts, I email questions so people can prepare a bit, but you have been very kind to meet me with such short notice. We're going to finish with another reading from Naz.

[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time.]

Thank you very much to both of you and MauMau for making my short stay in Istanbul even more amazing. It's enriched it a lot, just being able to meet all the artists encircling MauMau.

NC: Thank you for visiting us and please come back.

DT: This is an English thing, The League Of Gentlemen, but you must know how hard it has been not to tell a joke about death by MauMau. No one is going to get that, but it doesn't matter. Details about websites and the people Sine and Naz recommended to check out, we will put there.

End of transcript.