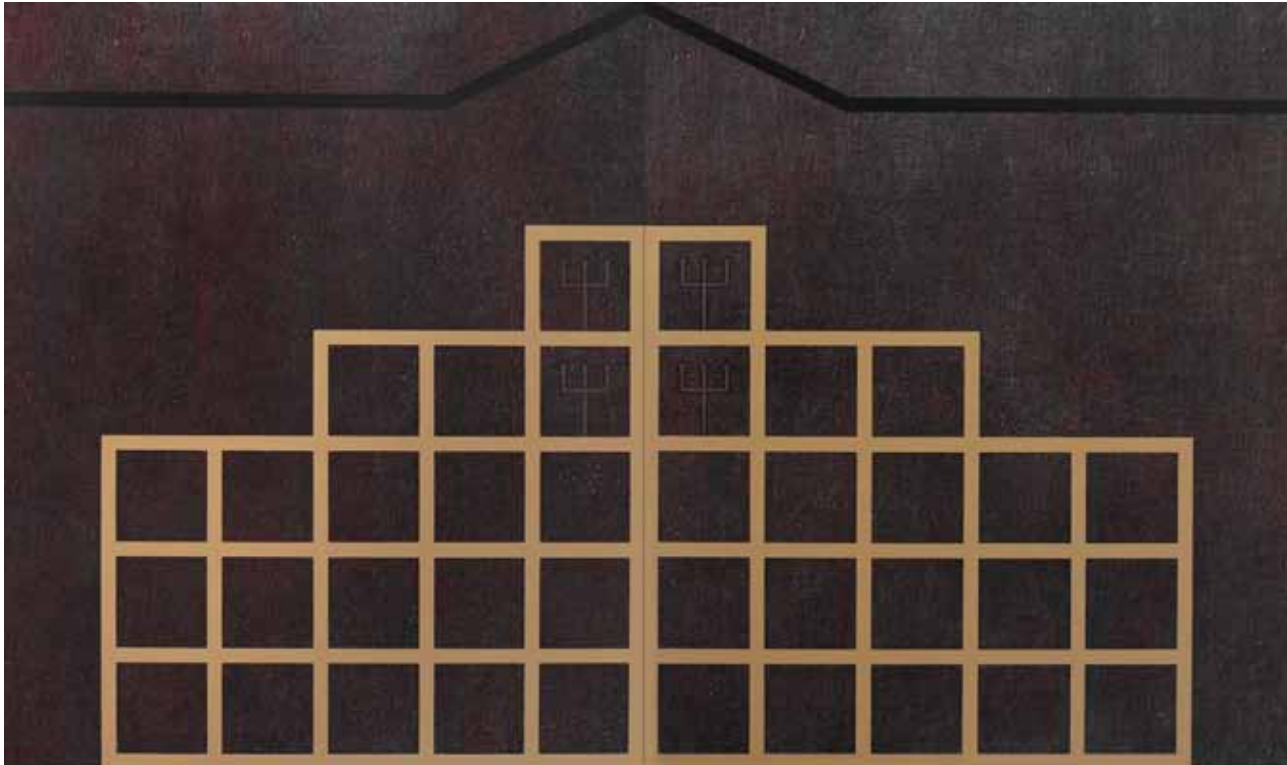


An Objects's Traces in Memories and its Cultural Journey – The Trident of Halil Akdeniz

By Prof. Dr. Eva Aleksandru Şarlak



Cultural Signs, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 240x400cm - Private Collection.

The brain is the house of memory that represents man's inner perception and phenomenon. However, the formation, organization and protection of existence consists of the external dimensions. Jan Asmann emphasizes the social and cultural framework as an external dimension and defines them as mimetic, objective, communicative and cultural issues. Cultural memory, in terms of memory belonging to objects and the convection of meaning, creates the main theme of this essay in relation to the tendency of chasing the traces of the 'trident' in the work of Halil Akdeniz. This paper will first expand on the theoretical background of

signs and symbolism, before moving on to discuss their relationship with Akdeniz's work.

Man finds himself surrounded by things that man created. The objects stress reflections on people, their past, commitment to their ancestors, in other words, they highlight the index of time. This journey is part of communicative and mimetic memory as it also moves beyond the main themes of cultural memory. Particularly, the transformation of symbols and signs to symbolism is inevitable in this process. This transformation makes up a building process of places that are created through memories. It is, in a way,

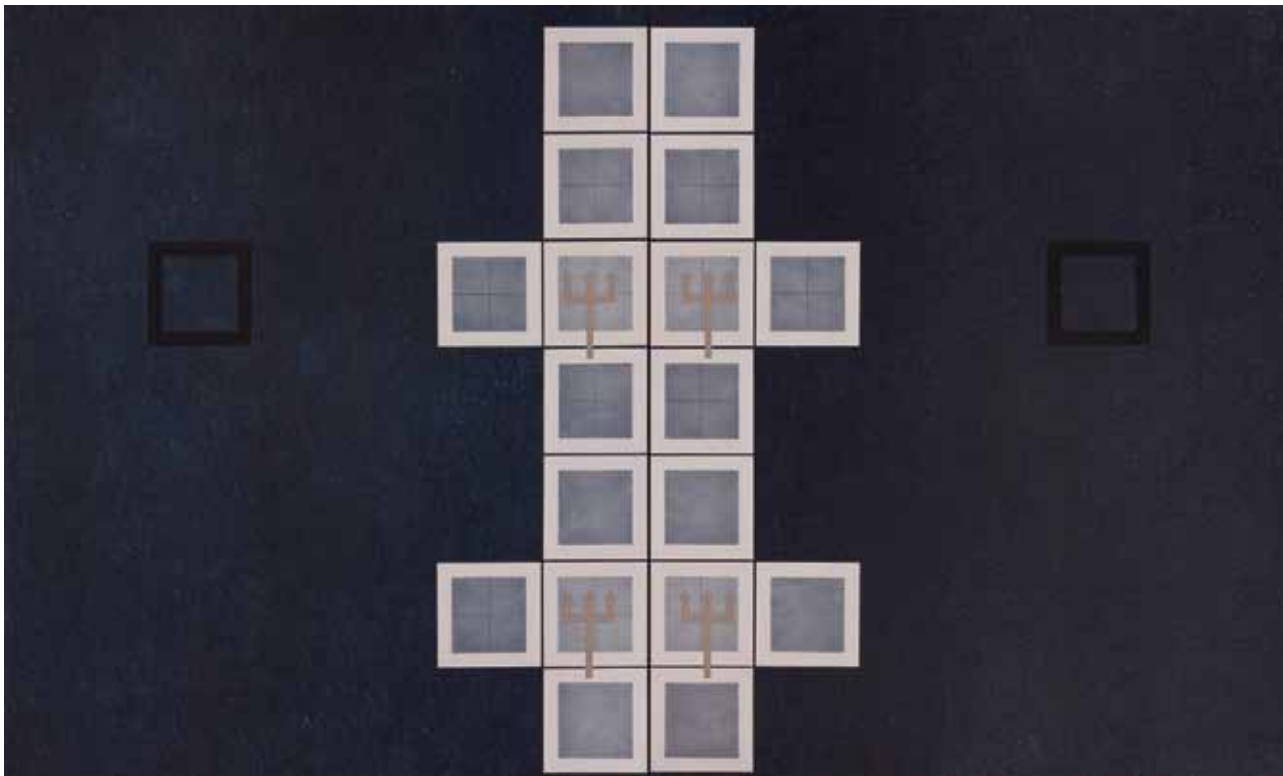


Cultural Signs, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 240x400cm - Private Collection.

an exchange of what is abstract to what is concrete. The concrete becomes abstract by hiding the abstract concept and the abstract becomes concrete. The content of symbol and signification depend on time and space. Qualitative objects play a key role in the world of symbols. They are the key elements of personification and identification. Qualitative objects create purpose. They give up being a medium and become an aim on their own. Going beyond the identification, they are a function of identity and part of an object's biography which involve its characteristics.

The Trident Legend: As a visual and formal creation of language, it is a quantifier object and while it carries us to an abstract, moral-didactic idea, it also has a general concept. The Sea God Poseidon talks with anger and takes action. Thereon he gathered his clouds together, grasped his trident, stirred it around in the sea, and roused the rage of every wind that blows till earth, sea, and sky were hidden in cloud, and night sprang forth out of the heavens." Homeros transmits us Poseidon's duty and characteristics within the frame of the objective mind. In Hesiodos's Theogonia, the son of Kronos and

Rhea, absolute commander of sea, Poseidon's 'trident' is a qualitative object; a symbolic representation of waters, seas and earth-quakes. The 'trident' has been studied as a wand with different propositions i.e it consists of one single object that concludes with three-items/prongs - connected to the production of objective and cultural memory. The objective mind forms within the triple systematics of the trident and reaches us as a possibility of power, or stages of hidden power. At the same time, the structure of the 'trident' has been described as layers of enmity and hostility. When Poseidon was given the task of being the commander of the seas; first of all he went to the sky, after to the earth and then to the sea. Thus, firstly, he would be the god of freshwater and then the god of water of earth. Poseidon was also honored with the name "Phytalmios" which means the god of vegetation. In this manifestation, 'trident' is a magic wand involving all resources. Poseidon throws his 'trident' to the Satyros to protect the daughter of Danaos (Amymone), who is the king of Argos. The scepter penetrates the body of Satyros and it sticks into a rock. Amymone get thirsty. She listens to Poseidon's



Cultural Signs, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 240x400cm - Private Collection.

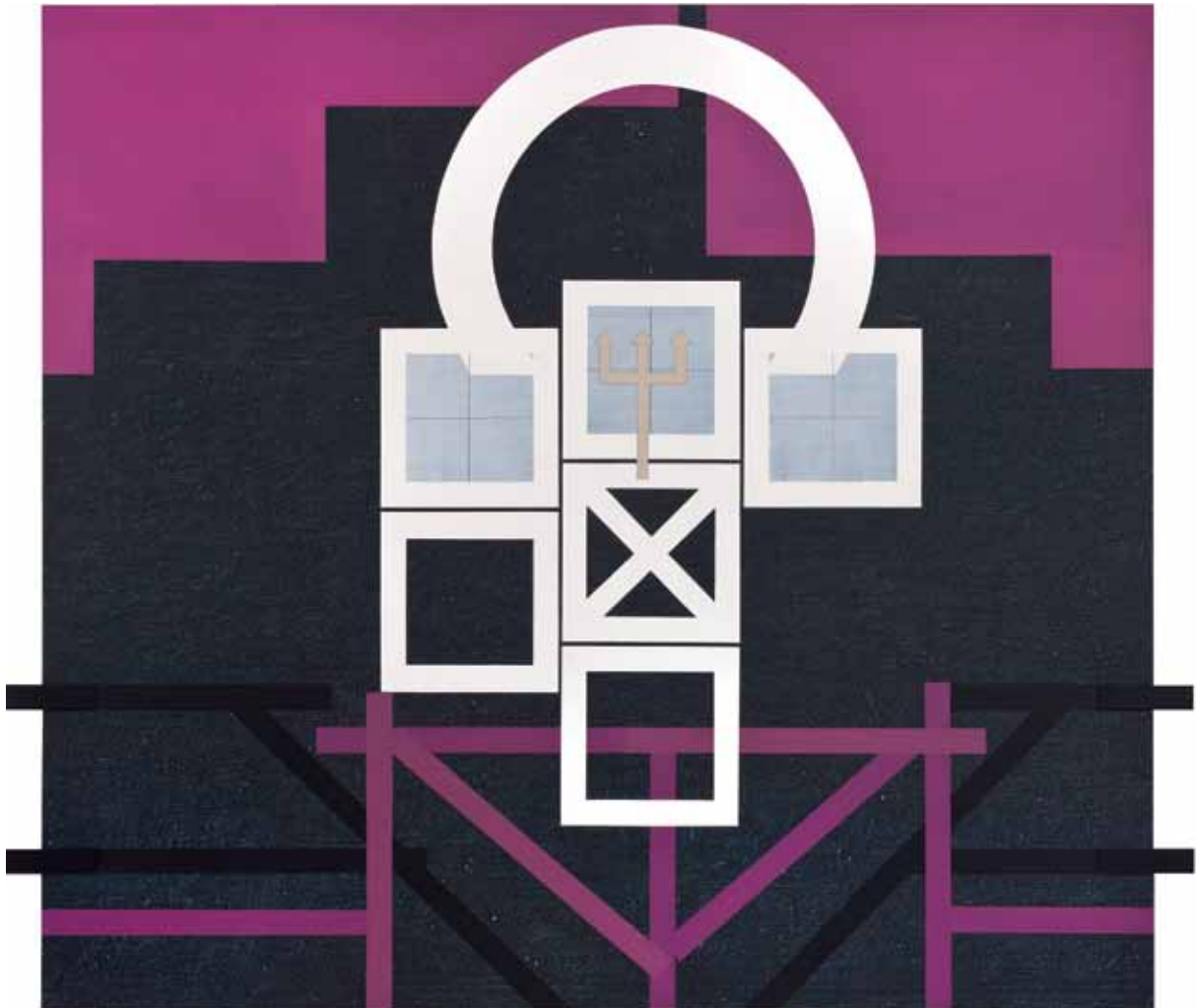
order and pulls out the 'trident'. Then, the rock starts to leak water from the three holes of the 'trident' and becomes a fountain of water.

Objective memory is enriched with the transition to the Neolithic age -as being an age of production- from the hunter and gatherer way of life. In this time we can also understand the 'trident' as a reference to private property in Mesopotamia (it is the first place of nutrition production/agriculture), and reflect a manifestation of cultural memory. Parallelism of its formation with the scythe and pitchfork can be explained within the framework of agricultural symbolism.

The 'trident' is also a sign of lighting as a qualifier object of a god, which can be identified in different regions. It has some parallelism with mythical narratives belonging to Assyrian origin. Pail Diel's proposal of the 'trident' describes his own proposition within the framework of the theory of ethics against the logical proposition. 'Trident' represents three sins which consist of three vital impulsion of food: food and storage, which transform to property, wealth and authority; reproduction, which

turns to enthusiasm; and sanctity and evolution, which turn to pride

At the same time, the 'trident' encapsulates the basic form of life: it is a reflection of Past, Present, and Future within the representation of Birth, Life, and Death. The statement "to be three in one" is frequently used in Mythology, e.g., three-fractional malice or replicas of diabolic trinity, such as the three-headed hell-dog Kerberos/Cerberus and the three-formed Hekate/Hacate, who is a goddess belonging to Anatolia and resembles Artemis from Ephesus and is also included in Hesiodos's Theogonia. In this time, the three-formed creature is lined to the she-dog by Azra Erhat and it implies Hekate and Artemis's parallelism of girl, woman and moon goddess. Thus the implication of connection between the 'trident' and three-bodied statues attracts interest. Roman gladiators often fight with equipment 'enhancements of the sea' and sailors use their 'trident' during war. This weapon, as a representation of power, provides a long-range fighting tool due to its length. The long length of the scepter refers to the celestial divinity



Cultural Signs, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 180x180cm - Private Collection.

of scepters thus, their chances to defeat their enemy. It can be seen as a medium of impulse for human beings in an attempt to establish sovereignty over distance. Gladiators who fight with their swords against Retarius can be defined within the framework of individual heroism. It is a confrontation of celestial and individual courage. As stated by Cirlot, there is a 'power' sign that represents patriarchal power against this individual courage. This can be evaluated as an 'absolute victory' within the framework of spiritual understanding of 'pater families' in Rome.

The 'trident' is also located in the cultural memory of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Its proximity to the sun disk evokes an antecedent symbol of the sun.

James Hall mentions the trident's representation of lighting in Buddhism in his 'Dictionary of Symbols'. In Buddhist faith, the 'trident' is associated with Buddhism's three-Ore which represent Buddha, Law and Public. The 'trident' is also the wand of the Hindu God Shiva. In this belief system, each of the spear tip's three-forks represent three features of nature: Creativity, Destructiveness and Securement. This desire, action and wisdom can be expressed as allusion. It represents forces against the devil, a powerful Shamanistic ritual object. In this context, it can be identified with true knowledge, true faith and true conduct. In fact, the 'trident' is a hierofani, meaning that it is a 'manifestation of being Holly'. Our encounters with this symbol in



Anatolian Civilizations - Cultural Logos, 2002, acrylic on canvas - iron construction, 166x100cm (17pieces) - Private Collection.

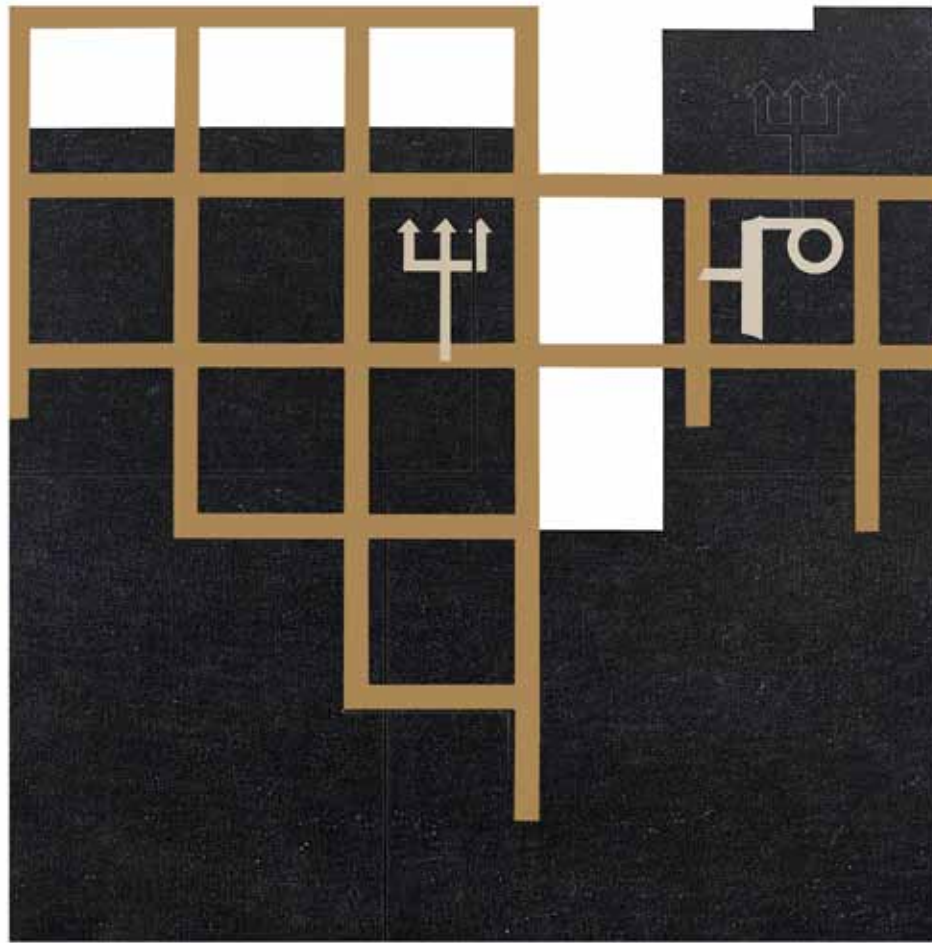
monotheism as an objective qualifier of the devil, also links to the creation of a memory of mankind towards pagan symbols. However, it does not create deviation in semantic representation. This representation is difficult and it can be evaluated within the framework of dualism. The faculty of producing meaning by people who can produce, think and also think about what they have already thought, can be seen within the trident's intercultural journey into the geography of the world. It can be witnessed by the exchange between the abstract and the concrete. Thus, the shaping of thought into the 'trident' and the transformation of the 'Trident' as a spatial harmony to thought may be an issue for us to discuss and explain.

Halil Akdeniz: Reconstruction of Cultural Signs

Preliminary investigations and stages of creation make up the basic discipline of Akdeniz's art production process. The formation process of the works emerging could be designated as part of a quest that comes with the artist's discipline.

Research discipline, process and quest become continuous with the art production and demonstrate the quality of his work both technically and conceptually. The work contains objects that are studied. It has been noted that not only objects but also the works themselves are tested and resolved in the contemporary context. The classic frame of his works is replaced by structures ongoing within various reconstructions. These structures are also supported by research, and can be seen as a transitional gate towards the following stages of the art development process. The object becomes involved in a new process after a time of researching, approving, and concluding alongside the assembly of the work on the floor. Presented to the audience, viewers witness the work of art as new perceptions of reconstructed symbols. There are number of main topics addressed in the works of Akdeniz: the universality of subject and its conceptual manifestation in the work of art; the integration of conceptual processes to the technic; and the re-construction of the audience after the completion of everything.

The majority of the aforementioned objects and topics are created by symbols, letters, and signs from ancient cultures, which are carefully investigated by Akdeniz. These signs were being used by different cultures with various indicators throughout the ages, and different geographies and cultures also have their own language. All these facets have contributed to the ascension of his works towards the concept of time. As pointed out in an interview with the artist, the letter 'fi', which is frequently used in his work, was produced by the Greeks. At the same time, he points out the significance of the 'f' of felix today as it implies an alternative energy in modern physics and in abstract concepts in modern mathematics. The example indicates that how signs can travel between eras. The artist explores this journey with key signs and reveals them within his works. Universality, created by perceptions of cultures, reflects the ideas that 'signs' can stroll around. This universality



Cultural Signs, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 180x180cm - Private Collection.

is processed as a manifestation of past, present and future. For example, use of the letter 'fi' with the 'peace' symbol shows an understanding that sign can reckon themselves with past, future and present. But, at the same time, it also shows how two signs, which seem to have two separate signifiers, can interact with each other on a modern platform. Thus, there is a process comes from past to the present and its flow of future is provided. The conceptual function of the artist's works should be considered in conjunction with the technique of the works of art. Indeed, this should be considered in the same way that the conceptual continuity of the subject is studied. Works register a constructive impact in terms of material and technique. Technique alone is not enough to fulfill the content of constructivism, i.e. there isn't a sketch process in Akdeniz's works. Signs

are frequently used by artists which are reminiscent of ancient marble colors: white, green and red, and they are assembled at the same moment within the act of painting, meaning that each stage of work stays faithful to process. Thus, signs that are used within the process of life by civilizations imply their own fictions. This in turn implies that an artist's fiction, depending on their process, continues to be fiction created. Here time ceases to be in issue because the sign is neither in the past, nor fixed in the present any longer. A transparent image is generated between work and image with wooden blocks.

It is clear that the artist developed much more his process, set up and exploration of space in his latest works, from 2012, named 'Signs of Culture'. Based on some of the concepts I have discussed above, the wand of



Cultural Signs, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 180x345cm - Private Collection.

Poseidon, the god of sea in Greek mythology, is placed in each of the works, which are 28 x 20 cm. Poseidon has the title *enosigalos*, meaning eradicator, thus the wand acts as a symbol of power. The wands used by shamans as a protector of evil spirits and also those used as a sign in agriculture, which is an important mainstay in Anatolia, have some similarities with the wand of Poseidon. All of these 'wands' are cultural samples which attract the attention of artist. This wand had been brought from the past by the artist, at the same time it can be a symbol of cultures which carried out technical changes in order to transport themselves to the future. The artist combines technical and conceptual statement by fixing the 'unit forms' one by one. These are open to interpretation and re-construction and, at the same time, they are resolutions of the current era and modern consciousness. Such objects provide the subject of study of cultural analysis like Akdeniz. In his previous works entitled 'Laws (Prohibitions) are Endangered' (2008), interpretation and the evaluation of concept are 'superior' and create the reality of it. In this way, the works that developed due to the artist's investigation of past, conclude with the instant production of the artists who presents a new process in contemporary times

which communicate whole new series of messages with his audience. These works can be reproduced as many times as you wish, their places can be changed, the choice of colors altered but if you really want to know what is invoked in these works then maybe you need to have information about the icons used by Akdeniz, as provided here. In addition, the fact that these icons knowingly or unknowingly are involved in our ordinary lives adds layers to this meaning. As a result, it can be said that Halil Akdeniz creates a universal awareness by digging up history. He also tries to set his works up for infinity and the timelessness of the cultural sign that he wants the audience to participate in.

Akdeniz was born in Antalya in 1944. He graduated from Ankara Gazi, Institute of Education, Department of Arts and Crafts in 1965, This was immediately followed by his winning of the State Specialization Scholarship Abroad, and he went to Germany. Between 1968 and 1974, Akdeniz completed his BA from the Berlin State Academy of Fine Arts-HdK, Berlin (currently, Berlin Fine Arts University), his Masters degree from Ege University and another Masters degree from Dokuz Eylül University. He earned his PhD (with

a thesis in Theory of Contemporary Painting and Its Reflections on Turkish Art) in 1990. He became an assistant professor in 1986, an associate professor in 1987, and a full professor in 1994. He worked as faculty member at Ankara Gazi Education Institute (currently Gazi University Gazi School of Education), Ege University, Dokuz Eylül University, Bilkent University and Anadolu University. Akdeniz founded the Painting and Fine Arts Departments at Ege, Dokuz Eylül, and Bilkent Universities. While at these institutions, he served at different administrative levels ranging from Head of Department to faculty board member, as well as university senate to university administrative board member. Between 1996 and 2001, Akdeniz was appointed as the Cultural Advisor to the Turkish Embassies in Bonn and Berlin and as Advisor to the Minister of Culture in 2001. He worked as faculty member at Anadolu University School of Fine Arts between 2001 and 2005. Having established art studies for the first time in Turkey, he launched Art Theory and Criticism Master's Programs at Anadolu University (2003) and Işık University. Akdeniz currently works as the Head of Işık University's School of Fine Arts Department of Visual Arts, as well as the Head of the Institute of Social Studies Department of Art Studies.

Halil Akdeniz is recognized in Contemporary Turkish Art with his works and research essays. Having served as the basis of his recent works and begun with the painting series entitled, 'Visual Reflections on the Izmir Bay Pollution' in 1978, and the 1980s with scientific research concentrating on the environmental problems in the areas he lived, his artistic analyses continued with 'Izmir Ephesus-Ruins Visual Notes' series. Covering various cultural regions of Anatolia, Akdeniz concentrated on 'Anatolian Civilizations-Intercultural', 'Anatolian Civilizations-Cultural Settings', 'Anatolian Civilizations-Culture Logos' and 'Anatolian Civilizations-Cultural Remnants.' Most recently, the artist has been focusing on a series of works entitled, 'Cultural Signs.' Having emerged during the aforementioned period, the works of Akdeniz, which contain many artistic and non-artistic elements, as well as contemporary interpretations and artistic analyses, were displayed in countless national and international exhibitions, biennials, triennials, art fairs, and museum

exhibitions. He has also won two international and numerous national awards. Due to his achievements and contributions towards Turkish Art, he was bestowed the honor of "State Artist" by the Turkish Presidency in 1998. He was selected as one of the artists to create art works in the interior space of the new building of the Presidential Pavilion and thus executed his work entitled, 'Anatolian Civilizations-Intercultural' on the wall of the building's library. His works are preserved in museums and collections in Turkey and abroad. Akdeniz has published four books (the last two are currently in the course of publication) on Turkish art and artists, as well as catalogue texts, numerous scientific articles, research papers and essays. In addition, four books have been published on the artist and numerous books and catalogues include his works. Akdeniz is an 'Honorary' member of the Münster Academy of Art in Germany. He is also a member of the International UNESCO-AIAP Association of Plastic Arts and, at one point, served as this Association's Chair of the Ankara Representative Office for the Turkish National Committee. Furthermore, Akdeniz is a member of UNESCO-AICA International Association of Art Critics and a founding member of AICA's Turkish National Committee.