

The Gezi Embroidery Project

- Margaret Ross Tolbert -



Urfa Bazaar

Much of the inspiration for my work comes from travels in Turkey and the Middle East. During numerous trips to Turkey I have retraced many of the ancient trade routes. I fill sketchbooks and listen to stories, learn dances and collect music-- research for my painting of Doors from the Silk Road.

I have always worked from these pocket-sized sketches to create the series of large Door canvases, featured in exhibitions and permanent installations in the United States and abroad. More recently, I wrote the book GEZI (meaning "tour"), where the sketches from Eastern Turkey combine

with the stories and events that unfolded while I was sketching. People tell me lots of stories while I am sketching, and I realized that in some ways this is the true subject of my artistic output.

To further create an exhibit that is simultaneously a limited edition of the book, I began the GEZI embroidery project. I wanted to create art that combined my sketches, my "outsider" perceptions, with the aesthetic of Turkish artisans. The sketches that illustrate the book have been enlarged and silk-screened on to a specially loomed cloth from Odemis, Turkey. I watercolor them,



and then return them to embroiderers in Kutahya, Turkey. These women add motifs from Turkish classical embroidery to counterpoint the scribbles and colors of my sketches. I give suggestions that reflect a painter's use of shapes and forms, but they contribute their own ideas as well. The resulting amalgam combines outsider and insider artistic sensibilities. The enclosed actual size photocopies of some of the GEZI pieces give you an idea of the work. Each piece is around 18 x 12 inches.

Top-Yellow boots at Forge series, Urfa Bazaar
Bottom- Mama Hatun Door

The GEZI embroideries are developing an enthusiastic following in the US and Turkey. Half of the selling price is returned to Turkey to help enrich the lives of those who participate in the project. For example, one of the participants has bought a laptop computer with the proceeds returned recently to Turkey.

The project is about conversation, collaboration, and the genuine innovation that occurs with this dialogue. While Hulya Ertan may embroider many traditional robes for henna ceremonies, the work she does on the GEZI embroideries is anything but traditional. It helps develop a new art form and aesthetic, and empowers these women to take on new and innovative projects.

These pieces have been seen privately, but never exhibited publicly. So now I am pursuing opportunities to show the GEZI embroideries. To date we have created 15 different images from GEZI, with additional variations of each; currently I am awaiting 35 new fabric pieces from the embroiderers.

The exhibit can also include the original sketchbooks whose sketches form the basis for both the book and project. Documentary panels and photographs can be included as well.



Mihrab in Mardin

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret Ross Tolbert".

Margaret Ross Tolbert

The Gezi Embroidery Project

- Participants -



This is Margaret Ross Tolbert, the artist behind the GEZI project.



This is Necdet Danis, owner of a shop in the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, long-time friend, and supplier of the Odemis cloth I use as the tapestry for the GEZI sketches. We look at samples, discuss sources and I decide on the custom size and quality fabric I need for the project. Necdet handles the orders and deals with the suppliers in Odemis.



Semra Durmus , left, with a Kutahya artisan. Semra Durmus has introduced me to many artisans in Kutahya and manages the GEZI embroidery project.



This is Semra Durmus standing left, and Hulya Ertan, standing right, collaborators on the Gezi Embroidery project, in Kutahya Turkey. Hulya has been the artisan involved in embroidering the images.