

Analysis of Dóra Maurer's Experimental Works in the Relationship between Photography and Graphic Design

Seda Nur ATASOY

*Giresun University, Görele Faculty of Fine Arts,
Graphic Design Department, 28800, TÜRKİYE*

Abstract: Dóra Maurer, whose works contain successful synthesis of photography and graphic design, is an artist of Hungarian origin who draws attention with her 'experimental and conceptual' works. This research aims to present an in-depth analysis of Maurer's works within this scope, to examine her works with theoretical and practical perspectives and also to explore the ongoing relationship of graphic design and photography in this respect.

The problem of the research is that of understanding the relationship between photography and graphic design in Maurer's works. In the research, a qualitative research methodology is adopted and document analysis technique is used. The collected data are analyzed by descriptive analysis.

The findings suggest that Maurer's experimental and conceptual approach to photography and graphic design has a significant impact on the development of modern art and design, and it is revealed that a more comprehensive understanding can be achieved by combining knowledge, methods and techniques from diverse disciplines in one work. In addition, Maurer's use of the photogram technique in her works within the principles of design exhibits that she reflects a conceptual approach that opposes the traditional concepts of representation and communication of her time. Many basic themes in her works, including the concepts of repetition, sequentiality, and abstraction, are also explained in this respect.

The research results exhibit that the works of Dóra Maurer make a significant contribution and add value to the effective use of photography and graphic design disciplines, and that the experimental approaches in the applications of these disciplines have an inspiring effect on achieving a more comprehensive and aesthetic understanding.

Keywords: Dóra Maurer, Photogram, Experimentality, Graphic Design.

1. Introduction

Art is an aesthetic form of communication and expression in which different disciplines such as painting, sculpture, cinema, photography and graphic design come together to communicate with the audience and occasionally, innovative works emerge from the cooperation of these disciplines. Within the scope of this research, the relationship between photography and graphic design in the rich communication network that art contains is referred and a detailed examination was made in order to understand the interdisciplinarity and the combination of different methods and techniques in particularly the artist Dóra Maurer's works.

It is seen that innovative and interesting works emerge in the experimental context when photography and graphic design are used in relation to each other in artistic production. When they are blended correctly; visually interesting, aesthetic and impressive works emerge while these two disciplines offer the artist diverse tools and techniques for creative expression.

"If the new language of images was used in a different way, it would gain a new kind of power through this use" (Berger, 2016).

John Berger, who is especially known for his art criticism, emphasizes in this statement that images can gain a new meaning and power by using and presenting them in an alternative way. As a result of using graphic design and photography together, these presentations can follow a series of experimental processes as seen in the works of Dóra Maurer, or they can be exemplified by Andy Warhol's design and photography combinations or El Lissitzky's typography-photo interactions.

The use of photography in the field of graphic design increases the visual appeal of graphic design works, makes the images of the works get diversified and the effect it leaves on the audience more intuitive and powerful (Chen et al., 2021).

With the continuous development of graphic design under the influence of technology, it can be said that it is integrated with more art disciplines and thus brings innovations. The idea that different disciplines feed one another and are organically connected to each other is spreading in practice especially by incorporating photography within the technical and aesthetic framework. Photography also supports the content language of

graphic design in terms of basic aesthetic principles and ways of artistic expression, and in this respect, it is included in many products and types of graphic design. For example; it can be a backdrop for illustration, poster and digital designs and also an aid for scientific illustrations to preserve the colors of the illustrated product. It may be used in catalog designs to promote a product. It may affect the appearance of a website and the senses of the users when used in web interface designs. It may strengthen the narrative of the scripture and support the sale with the feature of noticeability of the visual. These examples of using photography in graphic design can be bountifully multiplied. Concisely, photography is a highly significant narrator and supporter for graphic design, and it is possible to state that photography appears in many different ways, in almost all sub-types of design, and in the same way, graphic design is included and used in photography.

2. Theoretical Basis

Born in Budapest, Dóra Maurer is one of Hungary's most important conceptual artists. It is seen in her works that she deals with forms and proportions related to the concept of movement and change under the influence of the Hungarian Neo-avant-garde and her closeness to abstract art (URL 1). Emerging in Hungary in the early 1960s, The Hungarian Neo-avant-garde is a significant movement and a trend in contemporary art that reflects artistic innovations, pushes the limits, and aims to create a new art language by expanding the forms of artistic expression (Cseh-Varga, 2022). The most well-known artists of the Hungarian Neo-avant-garde movement include Dóra Maurer, Victor Vasarely, László Moholy-Nagy, György Kepes, Endre Tót and Imre Bak. The works of these artists are known for their geometric shapes, often sharp edges and the use of vibrant colours. In works of art, there are usually light and shadows, reflections, optical illusions and moving figures that emphasize experimentation.

Dóra Maurer, whose works will be examined within the scope of this article, is an internationally known contemporary artist who has produced works in various fields such as painting, printing, film, photography and graphic design. It is known that she produces works that leave a mark in the art world especially with her approach that combines different disciplines and her unique style accompanied by geometric patterns.

Maurer studied at the Painting and Print Graphics Department of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts between 1955 and 1961, became a lecturer at the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts in 1990, and a professor at the Faculty of Art at the University of Pécs in 1998 (URL 2).

According to Maurer, the purpose of university education and the task of the educator is to help the student to find the right art language and medium, to solve the art problem that fits her personality, originates from it and interests her, with different methods. In order to achieve this goal, she tried to show her students the methods, techniques and theories of creative work in fine arts; she has organized an art studio where her students can gain a wide range of practice and experience, further expanding the existing opportunities for experimentation and research (Király, 2013). With this awareness, it is understood that Maurer delivered the significance of mixing distinctive disciplines to her students, as in her own work, and also encouraged and motivated her students to do experimental research beyond the traditional practices and find their own way.

As one of the most innovative and influential artists of her generation, Maurer has participated in a number of significant international museums and exhibitions and gained attention with her graphic aesthetics, minimalist style and interpretation skills. By synthesizing the disciplines of photography and graphic design, she creates creative abstract compositions in her experimental works, thus presenting the mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between these two art forms to her audience to give them unusual experiences. While doing this, Maurer particularly used the photogram technique and achieved extraordinary results. This technique, which Man Ray previously used in his art practices and obtained abstract compositions by placing his own style and naming it rayogram after his surname, is also seen in the works of Dóra Maurer (Image 1) and it is thought that Maurer aims to support and develop visual thinking from different perspectives.



Image 1: Dóra Maurer, Photogram and Graphic '*Sluices 2A+B*', 1980.

Source: https://www.artnet.com/artists/dora-maurer/sluices-2-a-b-a-gh0MLoLfepr3fXNojKLP_g2

Date Accessed: 13.08.2022

Photogram is a photography technique without camera obtained by placing an object or a negative on a light-sensitive surface (Marien, 2015). In this technique, the artist, conscious of the role of light, causes the material to react by exposing it to light; in this way, the silhouette of the material or object is transferred to the paper by using an experimental method. Before Man Ray, the technique was first used by Henry Fox Talbot and Anna Atkins (URL 3). Subsequently, a similar technique was named 'Schadograph' by Christian Schad, again referring to his surname, and later Man Ray mentioned the 'Rayogram' technique. It is thought that Maurer preferred this technique to shed light on the creative expression forms in her works and to give them a conceptual dimension.

László Moholy-Nagy, who has produced works by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach in many branches of visual arts and is a member of the Bauhaus School, sees light as the primary tool of art, unlike painting and pigment. According to him, the light is as essential a material for photography as sound is a necessary and essential element for music. For Nagy, photography is one of the ways to creatively shape light, and he sees his experiments that he practiced by using the photogram technique as the first and the most important step on the road to photography (Eperjesi, 2021).

Trained as a graphic artist, Maurer also obtained patterns with graphic aesthetics by placing objects directly in the light source instead of photographing them with a camera in her work named 'Sluices 3' in Image 2. The artist grouped the small-sized wooden installation she had built in her studio on a white sheet of paper in rows and photographed this arrangement illuminated from a single direction (left in Image 2). In the right in Image 2, she successfully directs the objects and supports the sense of movement by transferring the motion obtained by the symmetrical repetition of the form onto paper with aquatint. In addition, the contrasting position of light and shadow on paper, combining her balanced and harmonious composition with her design talent, creates a quite strong visual effect on the audience.

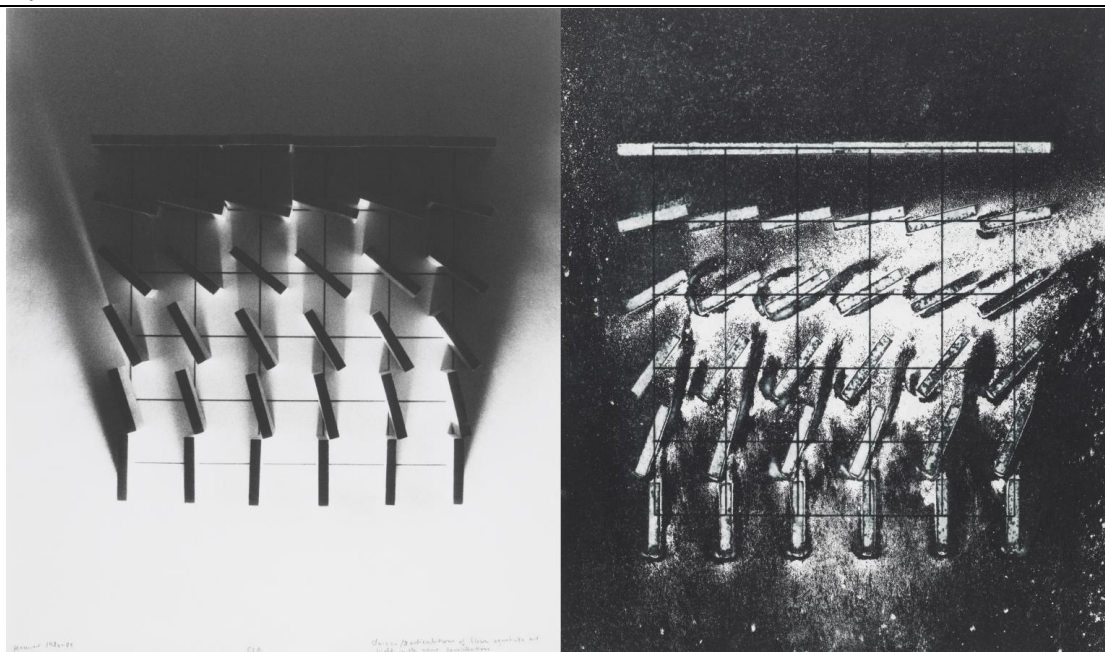


Image 2: Dóra Maurer, 'Sluices 3', 1980.

Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/maurer-sluices-3-a-b-t14287>

Date Accessed: 14.08.2022

In the experimental context, the combined use of photography and graphic design is an inevitable experience that is often seen in the works of graphic designers. This experience often produces unusual and creative results. Designers develop new approaches and produce original works by combining distinctive disciplines, materials and techniques. This approach creates an additional meaning by going beyond ordinary photography and design, and transforms into the expression of a subjective experience full of connotations for both the designer and the viewer.

Maurer has become one of the pioneers of interdisciplinarity by emphasizing the experimental process with her creative and original works in the history of graphic design and photography. Rule-based compositional logic, light, space, reflection of movement, conversion and displacement, and minimal geometric abstraction can be shown as common points in her works.

One of the significant artists known for collaborating with Maurer in the context of interdisciplinarity is Miklós Erdély. Miklós Erdély and Dóra Maurer, who are known to work together in the field of art and education and are influenced by each other, have been involved in a project and art community called INDIGO (Interdisciplinary Thinking), in which they reject the traditional rules of art and instead adopt innovative, experimental and conceptual approaches (Gurshtein, 2022).

Since the 1970s, Maurer has been exploring the nature of space and motion using a series of abstract images, typesetting, signs and language. She usually produces works based on mathematical and conceptual processes by reversing, repeating and repositioning objects. Maurer's process-oriented works combine the concrete and the conceptual, implying the centrality of perspective in art as in life (URL 4).

The effects of graphic design on a photograph manifest themselves in a number of ways such as composition, light, perspective, direction, texture, form and use of colors. In this context, in Image 3, it is seen that the artist emphasizes the subjective nature of movement with a series of objects, is attentive to the distance and order between the objects, creates her composition in this direction, and favours the elements such as direction and the masterful spread of light. It is possible to state that the repetition, sequentiality and formal structure in the work also creates a texture in the overall composition. The correct use of time in the light exposure process is also evident from the clear lines of the form and the smooth transition of tonal values. It is seen that the artist also considers elements such as symmetry and balance in this work. The work is colorless and negative as it is produced with the traditional photogram technique. In today's modern technology, the photogram technique can also be used in color.

In her works, she has adopted an experimental and innovative approach instead of objective reality by reflecting elements such as abstraction, repetition, rhythm, and simplification by trial and error method. Her re-evaluation by combining her knowledge in the fields of photography and graphic design in the photogram,

unlike traditional image productions, and the conscious forms she left in her designs are typical examples of graphic representation based on experience.

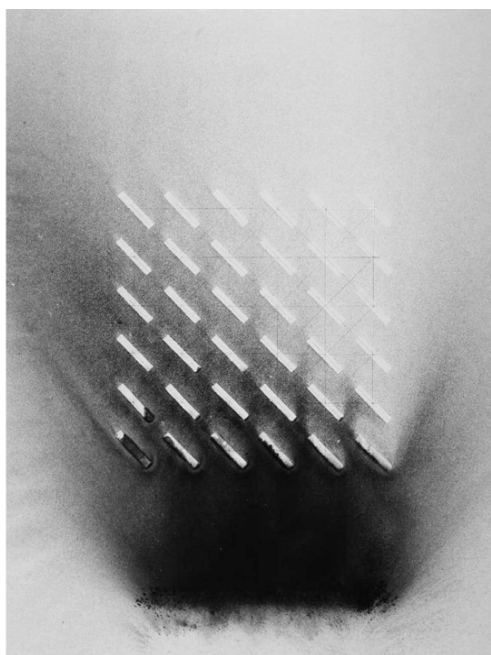


Image 3: Dóra Maurer, 'ZsilipekSluices', 1977-79.

Source: <https://doramaurer.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/maurer1.pdf>

Date Accessed: 21.08.2022

Maurer is known to have pushed the limits in her early works. For example, in her work 'Seven Foldings' (1975), she is known to fold an aluminium printing plate seven times before taking measurements (Image 4). Later, the artist turned to conceptual photographic series and experimental filmmaking, often exploring abstract sequences and analysis of everyday movements (URL 5).

Geometric shapes, lines and patterns are seen to be in the foreground in Maurer's work in Image 4 called 'Seven Foldings'. Rather than an emotional transference, an abstract and stylistic approach is followed in the work. Beside strong contrast and intonation, it is possible to mention a rhythmic structure. The artist's interest in the continuity of movement and her style based on the abstract geometric system are clearly seen in this work.

Maurer also draws attention with the use of optical illusions in this work which reflects a minimalist example of the concepts of repetitive and rhythmic structure which she often uses in her works. It is seen that each layer is folded from different angles and connected to each other at right angles. Designed in such a way that the viewer may experience an optical illusion when it is viewed from different perspectives, this work presents a dynamic visual experience to the viewer while at the same time showing that movement has an effect on the perception of time and space.

Maurer, who develops graphic design in her works by using design elements effectively in a mathematical order and with different geometric forms, creates different meanings in this way, and successfully reflects the peace of symmetry and order with her aesthetic expressive power. The foldability and divisibility of surfaces and forms, their opposing or similar formal orders, their harmonious repetitions and the use of the power of light are just a few of the experimental stages that the artist uses in her works and reflects on the audience.

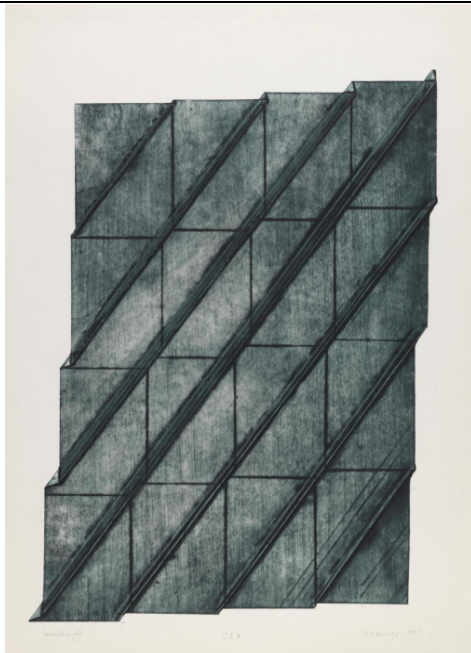


Image 4: Dóra Maurer, 'Seven Foldings', 1975.

Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/maurer-seven-foldings-p77124>

Date Accessed: 11.07.2022

Regardless of the tool used, Dóra Maurer is one of the most significant representations of the expression 'graphic thinking'. In Image 5, it is seen that Maurer uses the motion provided by the light in her geometrical arrangements and intends to give the audience a sense of movement and depth in her work with the illusion she achieves. It is known that the artist is one of the significant names of the 'Neue (New) Optical' aesthetics in this context. The abstract and rigid geometric shapes and light manipulations in her works also support this.

Neue Optik aesthetics enables us to establish a new relationship with the world that appears to us through the camera; It can overcome the limitations of human vision by breaking the established perceptions of gaze, space and light. During the Weimar period, photographers worked on stop-action photographs and produced experimental works. These works prioritize photography over all other art forms in drawing or capturing movement with photography by depicting human figures with movement (Hacking, 2015).

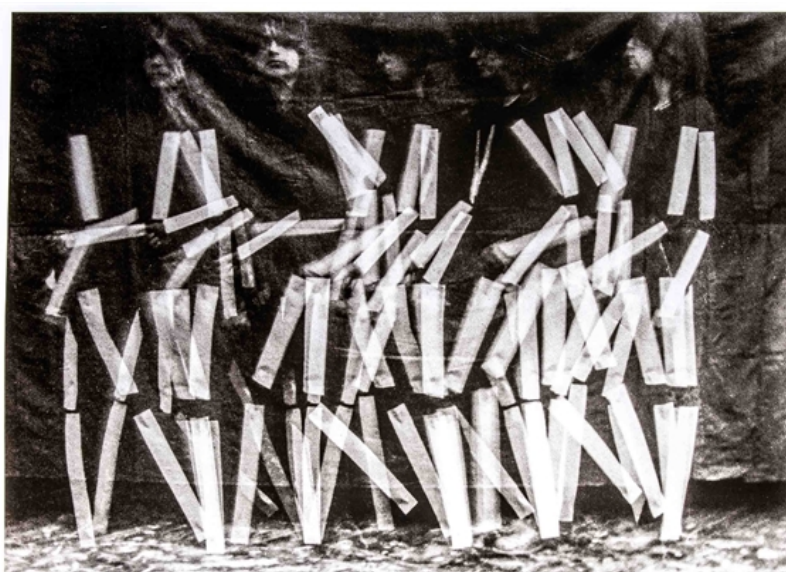


Image 5: Dóra Maurer, 'Bewegungsstudie nach Maray', 1981.

Source: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Bewegungsstudie-nach-Maray/23AD9D89272FF146>

Date Accessed: 19.08.2022

“Maurer follows the theme of showing the viewer options and what the viewer can do with those options in most of her works. A quantity of her works break down simple actions into parts. Thus, the viewer sees the piece not as a photograph of movement, but actually as movement” (URL 6).

Photography and graphic design have an inspiring relationship that they enhance and complement one another and this encourages innovation with its constantly updated experimental technical content. Maurer succeeds in resolutely reflecting this inspiring relationship in her works with movement, perception and transformation studies. In this context, “Bewegungsstudie nach Maray” in Image 5 can be given as a relevant example where Maurer superimposes the image using the multiple exposure technique and thus demonstrates the movement of the human body to the viewer in an aesthetic form.

It is thought that Maurer, who is known to use the movement which she attaches importance to in every work as an indicator of change and transformation in her works, aims to bring the rhythmic structure of the movement to the forefront with the graphical repetitions and directional curves she reflects to the viewer in the photography technique.



Image 6: Dóra Maurer – Book Cover Design, ‘*Itt Éjszaka Koalák Járnak (Koalas Walk Here At Night)*’, 1977.

Source:

https://www.europeana.eu/en/item/2048006/Athena_Plus_ProvidedCHO_Pet_fi_Literary_Museum_1109485

Date Accessed: 03.09.2022

Image 6 includes the cover design of the book “Koalas Walk Here at Night” by Dezső Tandori, designed by Maurer. In this design of Maurer, it is seen that concepts such as movement and trace are included. The work also carries the effects of conceptual art with its abstract and minimalist design that encourages the viewer to think and create meaning. It consists of two horizontal lines that run parallel to each other in the middle and represent the road, and parallel lines that pass over them asymmetrically and diagonally and are thought to represent the footprints of koalas.

The design is based on koalas who were crushed to death on the roads in Queensland, Australia (URL 7). The book contains 12 full-page photographs of Dóra Maurer (URL 8), it is seen that the artist transforms the book cover into a work of art by creating a unique composition with her ability of abstraction. The cover design represents disorder in order, movement in calm and it also reflects a competent example of modern graphic design style with its clean and clear lines, simplicity and aesthetics.

3. Research Method

In the research, a qualitative research methodology is adopted and document analysis technique is used. A selection of Maurer's works is made with random technique from the works that reflect the relationship between photography and graphic design. The works are examined in the context of photography and graphic design and analyzed with descriptive analysis. It is explained how she uses geometric forms, repetition,

abstraction and composition to explore the relationship between graphic design and photography. In addition, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to examine the practical consequences of her art. It is thought that the research has the potential to fill the gap in the literature in this context although the limited resources about Dóra Maurer constitute the constraint of the research.

The universe of the research is the art of Dóra Maurer. Its sample, on the other hand, is a selection of works that reflect the relationship between graphic design and photography disciplines.

Descriptive analysis method, one of the data collection tools that is frequently used in qualitative research and helps to better understand and interpret the data is used for this research. Descriptive analysis is also used to examine and convey visual materials such as artworks or designs in detail—the forms, patterns, materials, and other characteristics of the works. The data include academic sources such as journal articles and books, as well as non-academic sources such as online articles, blogs and exhibition catalogues.

4. Findings

The findings indicate that Maurer's experimental and conceptual approach to photography and graphic design has a significant impact on the production process, material selection, production methods, and the development of modern art and design. It has also been revealed that a more comprehensive understanding can be achieved by combining knowledge, methods and techniques from different disciplines in one work.

Maurer's use of photographic images and photogram technique in her works within the principles of design indicates that she reflects a conceptual approach that rebels the traditional concepts of representation and communication of her time. Quite a few of the basic themes in her works, including the concepts of repetition, sequentiality, and abstraction, are also explained in this context.

The experimental style adopted by Maurer in her works is a clear expression of her opposition to standard productions, her curiosity, her passion for research and her desire to discover what is new.

The artist creates a special space in her works where science meets aesthetics with her methodical approach in her working method and use of materials, technical knowledge and skills, art education and experience as well as the potential to create innovative ideas.

5. Conclusion

In the creation process of modern photography and graphic design, artists such as Man Ray, Victor Vasarely, László Moholy-Nagy, Dóra Maurer have made experimental applications in a number of different pursuits to strengthen the creative points in their works, and they have documented with their works that interdisciplinarity provides a significant contribution and value in this experimental process. As a result of this research, it is possible to state that different disciplines complete the work inclusive of creative thinking and distinctive aesthetic elements and can make room for new forms of expression and narration. It is also evident from Maurer's work that they are an advantage in promoting the expansion of the field of art and can offer the audience a more abundant visual enjoyment.

As a result of the education that Dóra Maurer received, it is seen that she includes graphic design in photography accompanied with certain design principles and conveys this relationship to the viewer with aesthetic efficiency. It is explained how Maurer adds value to her works with experimental expressions such as photograms, and how she competently conveys her passion for research to the audience with her consistency in concepts such as geometric abstraction, movement, time and rhythm.

It is known that photography only exists as an art with the artist who interprets it and adds aesthetic value to it. On the other hand, it is seen as quoting an existing image and even whether photography is art or not is still the subject of debate. Dóra Maurer's work goes beyond just quoting the image and is definitive proof that photography is an art. In addition, the fact that a work is fed with experimental processes and diverse disciplines also means that it can never be consumed and will always exist.

The works used in this research indicate that Dóra Maurer, who produces works with experimental methods and has significant experience in graphic design and effective use of photography, challenges traditional processes and distinctions in her art. The research also sheds light on the reflections of the experimental process on the work in order to find the right art language and medium, and emphasizes the value of interdisciplinary approaches.

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Author Profile

Seda Nur ATASOY completed her undergraduate education at Karadeniz Technical University, department of painting / graphic side branch in 2005. She received her master's degree at Atatürk University Fine Arts Faculty Photography Department in 2010. In 2018, she completed her Proficiency in Art (PhD) Thesis on "Augmented Reality Applications in Poster Designs" at Hacettepe University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Graphic Design Department. She has been working as an academician in the field of Graphic Design since 2010. She mainly produces works on Scientific Illustration, Digital Illustration, Handmade Posters, Augmented Reality Posters, Experimental Photography and Advertising Photography.