

Kaide [Plinth]

Aslıhan Demirtaş. (2016–2017). *Kaide [Plinth]* [Rammed earth]. Istanbul, Turkey.

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Kaide in Turkish means pedestal, principle, rule, or foundation. In Ancient Greek *kaide* refers to *plinthos*, which is a brick, i.e. baked earth. From architecture, a plinth refers to the base that supports the symbolic column of truth in both Eastern and Western culture. The soil, which is alive, is the principle, and building begins from this foundational truth.

Aslıhan Demirtaş created *Kaide [Plinth]* from 1.5 tons of soil, clay, flax fiber, fine grain Küfeki stone (a type of limestone local to Istanbul), and terracotta to form a rectangular parallelepiped of 1m x 1.5m x 0.55m of rammed earth. Its shape resembles a *bostan* from the 1,600-year-old Yedikule Gardens cultivated along Istanbul's historic walls. Demirtaş's activism has involved protecting these time-honored vegetable gardens from municipal demolition for the purpose of "culture" and tourism. *Plinth* also reminds one of the earth covered tombs in Istanbul's cemeteries where the plant life flourishes with the afterlife. The land is rooted, but *Plinth* may be a symbolic turning of soil that moves at the base of the city.

Plinth first appeared as *Nâkil* in the comprehensive project *Umulmadık Topraklar* during the 26th ARTİST/İstanbul Art Fair together with the city's Association of Archeologists (Arkeologlar Derneği İstanbul Şubesi) and the KHORA design team. From November 12–20, 2016 this rammed earth platform uncovered how traces of soil have been carried through migration. Later curated by Özge Ersoy at Collectorspace, *Kaide [Plinth]* was installed and held near Istanbul's Taksim Square between March 8–May 31, 2017. Nazım Can Cihan and Sadık Atar formed the earthen brick while photographer Ali Taptık documented the process of making and un-making the prism. Demirtaş invited farmers and artists to engage with the installation. Each person offered words or materials from their own collection practices (Demirtaş, 2018). The soil taken for *Plinth*'s formation was returned to its source. Inquiries into value, tangibility, and preservation emerged from this relationship.

Farmers' hands have touched this old, deep relationship that lies within the base of our civilization. Despite today's financial city, *Plinth* awakens the fundamental memory of body as soil. Displacement is one issue at the heart of Demirtaş's material investigation. Subject to the demands of capital, e.g. financial dispossession in Istanbul today, urban consumption anticipates the disappearance of both the farmer and the soil (Bissen, 2015, 3, xxx–xxxiii). One reality of this flow is the movement of people from rural Anatolia to Istanbul, not to mention Kurdish forced migration and internal displacement. *Plinth* surfaces at a time and in a place where every parcel of land is eaten, even beyond itself. Afrin is only a single, latest example. Demirtaş questions mobility within the contemporary cultural condition. She asks, "what if everything else changes around you—how do you become a refugee without even moving an inch?" (Demirkazik, 2017). This feeling can be found today in the aggressive development not only of Turkey but also of the urban core of the U.S., Italy at the half of the 20th century, or anywhere rurality has become a sliver of society—by either moving or staying.



Photograph by and courtesy of Ali Taptik, Onagore, 2017.

In fact, as highlighted by Demirtaş, urban land can be displaced because living “soil cannot be uprooted and displaced into a constructed whole” (Bissen, 2015, 3, ^{cclxci-cclxcii}). While “the city is the most effective tool for making images” (Ibidem, 2, ^{xlii}), the “soil is not an empty box to be filled” (Ibidem, 3, ^{cclxxxviii}). Through *Plinth* and beyond artifacts, Demirtaş finds that the rural in the city is not to be made into the nonliving (Demirkazik, 2017). Like money or financial capital, if the soil structure is reproduced without its principle, then it flows away from the root. Picked up, used, and

disposed of, soil may be lost to sanitization. Such a packaged product may have only one way out and its direction is present in the cracks of soil. At the surface, the earth opens “for a logic to emerge from beneath the layers of absolute knowledge” (Bissen, 3, lxxiv). *Plinth*’s weathering has shown this (Demirtaş, 2018).

Rural is a principle of urban civilization. Soil is a principle for the rural. Biophilic design seems an excessive category as long as soil remains the plinth of our society, meaning we might “lose the ability to feel nature, and feel only its reproduction” (Bissen, 2015, 2, xcvi). Soil and body are alive and living as threats to this system of financial dispossession. *Kaide [Plinth]*, in the form of a new rammed earth space, will be installed in Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Demirtaş remains an artist who acts at the site of tension.

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