

Turkish bookplates dedicated to broadening Western art

Art of Ankara Ex-libris Society

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SNAP Gallery

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Do you think that tapestry weaving you found at a yard sale is the only ancient art form most worth reviving? SNAP Gallery hopes to convince you otherwise with its exhibition of *ex-libris* prints, on loan from the innovative Turkish art foundation, the Ankara Ex-libris Society.

Featuring upwards of a dozen artists, SNAP's latest exhibition marks the unprecedented showing of the Ankara Ex-libris Society in Canada, and to honour this occasion, society president Hasip Pektas himself will be present to inaugurate the exhibition.

"*Ex-libris* means 'From the books of,' and 500 years ago, the prints were used to indicate the ownership of books," says SNAP board member Earl McKenzie. "[Though] the *ex-libris* tradition is rather unknown in Canada, I think [Canadian audiences] will find it quite interesting."

Traditionally, a perfunctory coat of arms and the Latin words *ex-libris*

were affixed to the inside cover of the books to indicate a particular book's possessor. As *ex-libris* prints—otherwise known as bookplates—evolved into an art form in its own right, the subject matter began including images of cultural and political importance.

Ex-libris prints emerged in Europe nearly 500 years ago in response to the advent of the printing press and the subsequent mass production of books. The democratizing nature of this technology required a means for the nobility to assert their ownership over their precious collections of books. Now infrequently used as functional bookplates, contemporary *ex-libris* artists are no longer limited to the whims of their wealthy patrons.

"Some of the popular subject matter in the *ex-libris* tradition is cultural, such as music, while erotic prints are also a popular subject in *ex-libris*," McKenzie explains. "In the modern tradition, [the artists] will often dedicate the print to a well-known person. There are prints in this exhibition dedicated to Bill Gates of Microsoft, to George W Bush and to quite a famous Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk. Through an *ex-libris* print, the artists will sometimes pick a fairly well known person and express their ideas about that person and their notoriety."



COCK-A-DOODLE DOODLE The Art of Ankara Ex-libris Society exhibition shows off some of its bookplate drawings.

Although Western interest in bookplates has waned, this artistic tradition has flourished in Turkey in recent years. The Turkish revival can partly be attributed to guiding influence of the Ankara Ex-libris Society. While travelling in the Middle East, McKenzie's interest in unfamiliar print mediums and print artists was piqued by the uniqueness of *ex-libris* prints. Looking to familiarize Canadian audiences with this art form, McKenzie collaborated with Pektas to

establish an exhibition at SNAP.

McKenzie anticipates that viewers of the current exhibition will appreciate the precision required in creating bookplates. Of the various mediums employed by *ex-libris* artists, McKenzie speculates that engraving will be particularly appealing to Canadian audiences unfamiliar with Old World artistic techniques. Likewise, McKenzie emphasizes that *ex-libris* prints are not limited to archaic methods of

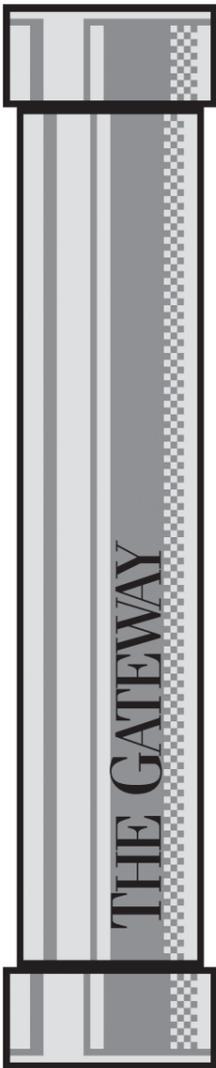
production, as their mediums are often as diverse as their subject matter.

"I can see artists who work in print media taking up this tradition," McKenzie says. "[Yet] I don't know if it will become something that people will [collect for their] home or institutional libraries. But even though I don't know if it would achieve that kind of popularity, I think within the print-enthusiast community, it would become more popular."

This is not an actual Internet tube, but an artist's recreation.

Real Internet tubes are filled with banner ads, pornography, YouTube videos and the Gateway's news.

Not Italian stereotypes.



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