

Project Proposal by Şansal Güngör Gümüşpala, Faculty of Social Sciences

November 15th, 2022

This project aims to convey history to the public through art. I believe that embroidery on paper is a powerful tool for storytelling and reviving interest in important pieces of history. I would like to focus on the scrapbooks that are part of the Transgender Archives' University of Ulster/Richard Ekins collection. Using high-quality photocopies of selected pages, I want to transform these archival materials by embroidering with colourful threads various elements to further share the stories of trans people as told in the newspaper articles.

I chose these pieces given that the newspaper clippings found in the scrapbooks were first public. These trans people's lives once made the news, and I am left wondering how many of these stories were written by them or by a trans person. As a nonbinary trans person, I want to bring them back into the public eye through my stitches and knots. I want to convey various emotions, sometimes highlight the whimsicality of an old gossip, or reveal a secret love story.

This personal project brings together spheres of my life in a meaningful way. As an international student who experienced oppressive pressures due to my engagement within the LGBTQ+ community in Turkey, I share similar instincts with the creator of these scrapbooks. I also cut news articles from the newspaper I accessed growing up to provide myself with reminders that others share experiences that are familiar to me, although not necessarily positive. This project, therefore, speaks to me on a personal level, highlighting the commonalities of human emotions through time and across cultures.

While there is a big focus on digitalization and online resources, the creation of a physical exhibit as the creative outcome of this work would present an opportunity to connect attendees to the physical materials being used for this project. I believe seeing the original archival materials side by side with my embroidered interpretations will be valuable. If successful in my application, this exhibition will bring archival material in a sensory way to the public. Touching the stitches of my embroidery will provide an alternative description of otherwise two-dimensional archival materials. With this, different sensory experiences of the archives can be highlighted; with the originals, people can experience the smell of history while seeing the colourful embellishments highlighting the main story of the newspaper scraps.

Finally, this fellowship and the support provided by the library staff and faculty will help increase my knowledge of the materials found in the various collections. Expand my understanding of how archives can be used for academic and artistic projects, including my thesis. I am curious to learn how materials from Turkey could be found and preserved to further expand the existing archives.

Trans archives are full of moments that shed light on and illuminate today. I think it would be nice to trace the trans experience in archives and to look at trans history from an uplifting view through art.