

Making Something out of Noth-

On Capitalism and the Plastic Trade

**by
Mathias Kessler
&
Ahmet Civelek**

Years/Places: 2022–2025 — Adana (TR), Istanbul (TR), Vienna (AT), Frankfurt (DE), Kleinwalsertal (AT), Busan (KR).

Project Statement

Making Something out of Nothing follows the transnational afterlife of plastic—tracking exported European waste as it moves into Turkey’s informal economies, then returning it to public view as collectively made artworks. The project spans on-site research, participatory workshops, and context-specific installations, weaving together documentary images from Adana with week-long public performances in Istanbul and exhibition chapters in Vienna and beyond. By turning packaging and beach plastics into large woven carpets and suspended “flags,” the work refuses the notion that waste is an endpoint; instead, it reveals how materials keep acting on bodies, landscapes, and policies long after disposal. The result is part testimony and part social sculpture: a shared process that exposes the failures of export-driven recycling regimes while inviting audiences to step inside an architecture of color, texture, and accountability.

Adana Turkey, Field Research September 2024

Kessler, together with Ahmet Civelek and photographer André Schönherr, documented how mixed European plastics—often shipped by intermediary companies and relabeled as “recyclable”—are intermingled with demolition debris, then illegally burned, buried, or dumped without oversight on the outskirts of Adana. The team’s images and footage show how these practices contaminate soil and air and shift environmental risk onto local communities. This foundational research anchors subsequent chapters, supplying both the visual evidence and ethical urgency that the project carries into gallery spaces and public programs.



Adana Tuerkei, September 2024



Adana Tuerkei, September 2024



OG Gallery, Istanbul — Performative Weaving (Sept 2024)

At OG Gallery, the space was transformed into a participatory workshop where visitors, neighbors, and local school classes joined the artists in cutting and weaving strips of plastic waste collected throughout Istanbul. The process unfolded publicly over several days, with tables, tools, and makeshift looms filling the exhibition space.

Children and students took part in scheduled sessions, turning the gallery into an environment of learning and collaboration. Layer by layer, the woven sections evolved into colorful carpets, each carrying traces of many hands and spontaneous decisions. The result—50 hand-woven carpets, each roughly 110 × 150 cm—was later assembled into large wall-sized works (around 4 × 5 m). These surfaces record both the material history of plastic and the collective gesture of transforming what was once discarded into something communal and alive.



Making Something out of Nothing, 2025, OG Galleryl, performance



Making Something out of Nothing, 2025, OG Galleryl, performance



Making Something out of Nothing, 2025, OG Galleryl, performance

Making Something out of Nothing

Austrian Cultural Forum

November 2024

A project by Mathias Kessler and Ahmet Civilek, with contributions by Christina Elsaesser and André Schönherr

At the ACF Istanbul, the project shifted toward photographic architecture. Large-scale prints (each 2 × 2 m) based on the Adana research were mounted as panels that created a walkable maze through the exhibition rooms. The viewer navigated between these image walls, encountering fragments of industrial landscapes and plastic textures on every side.

Within and between the sections, woven plastic carpets subdivided the space, acting as both sculptural floor elements and connective tissue between the image structures. This combination of printed documentation and tactile weaving emphasized the circulation of material and memory, transforming the exhibition into a spatial translation of the recycling loop itself.



Making Something out of Nothing, 2024, ACF Istanbul, site specific installation



Making Something out of Nothing, 2024, ACF Istanbul, site specific installation



Making Something out of Nothing, 2024, ACF Istanbul, site specific installation

Imagine Climate Dignity

Kuenstlerhaus Wien, March 2025

Mathias Kessler, Ahmet Civelek

The Istanbul performance pieces were recomposed into one expansive wall, re-situating the participatory carpets within an exhibition architecture that makes the relation between art and waste physically legible. Here, the project's logic of transformation—trash into pattern, pattern into structure—meets the museum context, inviting slower looking and public debate. Photographs from Adana and the OG workshop, installed alongside mirrored and printed film surfaces, extend the documentary thread while foregrounding the tactile presence of the plastic fibers themselves.



Making Something out of Nothing, 2025, Kuenstlerhaus Wien, site specific installation



Making Something out of Nothing, 2025, Kuenstlerhaus Wien, site specific installation



Making Something out of Nothing, 2025, Kuenstlerhaus Wien, site specific installation

Busan Biennale

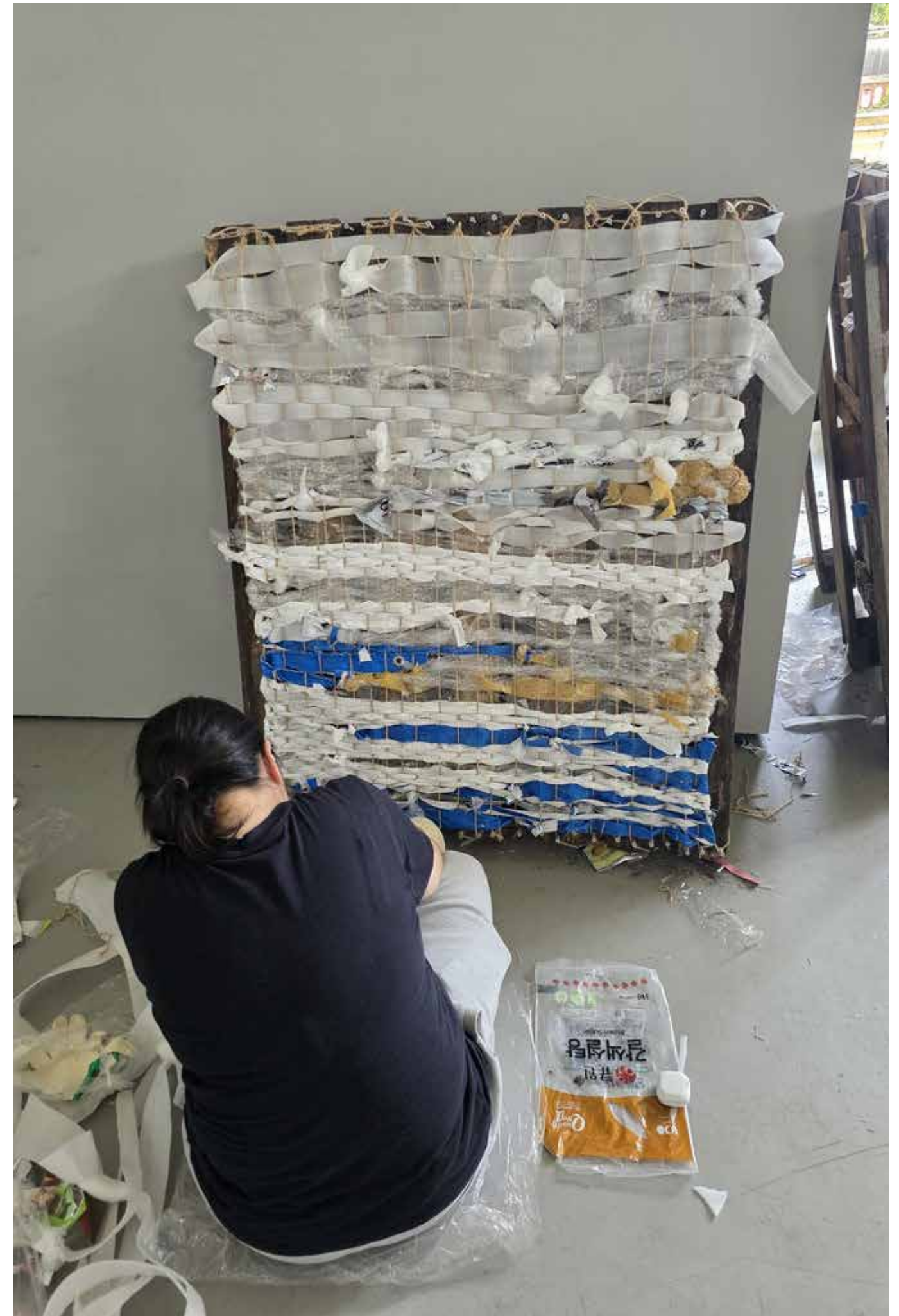
Sea Art Festival 2025

Undercurrents: Waves Walking on the Water

Dadaepo Beach, Busan, October 2025

Mathias Kessler, Ahmet Civelek

In Busan, the project turns seaward: discarded packaging and beach plastics gathered around Dadaepo Beach are hand-woven into a monumental carpet (approx. 600 × 1200 cm), then suspended on two metal structures to produce a wave-like canopy. Visitors can walk beneath it, reading colors, seams, and residual traces up close—a bodily scale that mirrors the planetary scale of marine pollution. This chapter extends the project's collaborative ethos, linking local collection and making to a shared public, and reframes the shoreline as a threshold where global supply chains visibly wash ashore. able materials and invites us to reflect on the global cycle of consumption and pollution.







Works

Project Summary

Selected Photographic work from the Exhibition at the Austrian Cultural Forum Istanbul and Kuenstlerhaus Wien 2025:



Making Something out of Nothing I, 2024, Istanbul, Turkey, 500x600 cm, woven carpet out of plastic garbage



Making Something out of Nothing II, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing III, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing IV, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing IV, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing VI, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing VII, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing VIII 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing IX, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Making Something out of Nothing XI, 2025, Adana, Turkey, Chromogenic Inkjet Print, 60x90 cm, framed



Plastic Carpet from Istanbul to Germany I, 2025, Adana, Turkey, woven recycled Plastic 100x120 cm, Framed