



University of Cyprus  
Department of Turkish and  
Middle Eastern Studies

The Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies invites you to the seminar:

## Cypriot African Heritage: An unspoken legacy

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**Speaker: Serap Kanay**

Tuesday, 4 April 2023

Time: 19:00

Room: E010

Old Campus – University of Cyprus

Kallipoleos Avenue, 75





## Abstract

The questioning of self and the search for true identity has formed a large basis of most of my work. Being black, being Cypriot and feeling 'different' became a quest to find a true identity and all the truths within. Arising from the need to identify myself other than "the other" while filling in official forms in England, I started using "Black Cypriot, Turkish speaking" as a category of identification to reflect my origins.

Since the mid 1990's my research seeks to explain the concept of Black Cypriotness and to find out if other black Cypriots see themselves as such and whether or not that knowledge has produced a concept of black Cypriot identity. I aimed to establish the reality of this group's life experiences by looking into any differences from the majority society and bringing into discussion the question of their origins and in/visibility.

The use of oral history and collecting stories were employed in order to understand people's perception of themselves and their perceptions of how others see them. Alongside some historical evidence to put the issue in perspective, my work concentrates on the informal interview findings. This I believe brings the subject alive by creating an opportunity for people to talk about a seldom discussed issue and through this gain knowledge of similar experiences and so acquire a sense of self, of placement and of belonging.

Standing tall on the shoulders of my ancestors, my continuing work on this issue is fluid and manifests itself entwined between art, academia, storytelling and presentations which I hope will enable others to be brave to be seen. I am in the process of publishing a book with the first set of my interviews, starting with the oldest people I interviewed who were born between the years of 1909 and 1950.





## Biography

Serap Kanay is a freelance artist, social commentator, and a tourist guide who was born in Famagusta, Cyprus. She did Foundation Studies in Art and Design at London Polytechnics and received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from London Guildhall University. In 2014, she received a Research Master's Degree in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) in the Netherlands.

Taking 'Personal is Political' as her motto, Kanay is interested in the telling and the archival of alternative "Hi-stories"; focusing on "Herstory" through art. Memory, gendered oral history, African Cypriot heritage and trauma are her prime research areas. The Mediterranean Sea along with Cypriot land and skylines are her breathing spaces, her lifelines. Her main form of expression is Installations where she employs the use of sound, text, textiles, photographs and video as medium.

Kanay has participated in exhibitions, art collaborations, workshops, conferences and paper presentations in Cyprus, England, Sweden, France, Italy and Germany. She is also co-author of two academic papers entitled "Embracing Afro Hair Resisting Colourism: Black Women's Experience in North Cyprus", published in Ethic and Racial Studies, October 2021, and "Afro-Cypriots: Prejudice, Colourism, Racism, and Rising Black Consciousness in Cyprus," published in Journal of Intercultural Studies, July 2022. She has been avidly researching Afro Cypriot Heritage since the mid-1990's. Her work in this area has been included in several academic theses.