

Başak Ürkmez

IMAGINING KASSIA  
WHAT DO KASSIA'S POEMS TO ME?

A student graphic artwork/storytelling project inspired by Kassia's poems

**A joint project of  
Istanbul Gender Museum  
and  
Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul  
Graphic Department, Illustration Kurs, summer semester 2021**

Istanbul has always been a vibrant city at the intersection of east and west, which brings along opportunities and confusion. Its inhabitants left their traces in the city and its society. In this context the Kassia project was an important experience to remember an important Istanbul character and visualize a remarkable woman with my students. With the project, I wanted to explore the change of the city and at the same time find out how design can act as a bridge between the past and the present.

Today, when violence against women is an important problem, the fact that the thoughts of a strong female character like Kassia are still up-to-date has shaped the project. I asked the participating students to study Kassia's texts and design a personal illustration based on this experience. The project excited the participants. They said, "Why haven't we met this extraordinary character who lived in the Byzantine period before?" They read Kassia's lines and thought about Kassia. Kassia's lines addressed social and political issues, but they also made the readers feel stronger. Each student designed an illustration for their Kassia. The students' illustrations brought Kassia's voice into our present day. Kassia's lines addressed social and political issues, but they also made the readers feel stronger. These illustrations actually represented a universal understanding, not a text. Kassia's surviving words were so influential that many students also used the opportunity to think and talk about their own lives or future prospects during the project.

Illustrations are a powerful tool for making texts visible and pointing out the importance of characters. The students' illustration project created lasting bonds with the students and a strong female character. By understanding someone who has lived in the past, the project showed how the past can be accepted and respected. I rediscovered the power of design. By sharing our stories, we can build the foundations of mutual understanding and contribute to social peace.

Students whose work is included in the project: Ayşenur Aydın, Betül Elarşlan, Beyza Keskin, Çiğdem Haliloğlu, Hatice Zehra Selman, İremnur Çelebi, Işıl Başak Arabacı, İzel Zümrüt Durmaz, Kaan Tanhan, Muaz Semih Güven, Nisa Nur Arşlan, Ömer Kaan İşleyen, Selin Su Bağcı, Serkan Yıldırım, Yunus Margaz, Zeynep Kübra Alkazak.