

# Ex-libris As Artist's Indicator

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## Abstract

*In this article, in which “ex-libris” is investigated and examined as artist’s indicator;*

- 1) *The ex-libris works, which some people who value their books and art add to the covers of their important books are tried to be explained by defining them with various dimensions based on their development process.*
- 2) *The significance and meanings of these artistic works (ex-libris), which are not larger than the cover of the books that they are attached to, are discussed as the indicators of their designer and those whom they are designed for.*
- 3) *With reference to my assertion that the works of ex-libris are indicators of both the artists who design them and the people who they are designed on behalf of; various examples of ex libris are examined as the indicators of the artist who design them and also the artist for whom they are designed, and semiological analysis is made for their possible meanings.*

**Keywords:** *Ex-libris, Semiology, Indicator, Sign, Art, Artist, Graphic Design, Visual Communication Design*

## Introduction

One of the key application categories of graphic design is ex-libris, which is usually pasted behind the front cover of books that are considered important by their owners in order to mark them as belonging to ‘the person whom it was designed for’. With this feature, ex-libris indicates who owns the book that bears it behind its front cover.

Given the fact that these small sized artistic works are usually designed to be pasted on the back of the front covers of the *qualified books* in libraries of people - especially who hold their books dear - in order to indicate that they are special to them and therefore valuable, their sizes need to be sufficient to find space on the covers for themselves. These artistic works which are reproduced in the size that they will not overflow from the cover of books are designed for the living people. Ex-libris is not designed for those who are not alive anymore; because they wouldn’t have their own library consisting of books that they could add ex-libris to their covers. Although ex-libris is designed for the living individuals, people who are not alive, values and/or themes can be the subject of ex-libris design.

Exclusive (unique, single) ex-libris works which are designed *privately* for the individuals are reproduced with various printing methods and each copy is added separately to the books of the person whom the ex-libris is designed for, thereby involve in aesthetic life that they are intended for. However - over time - it is also possible to encounter examples in which ex-libris could be designed only for one book and be applied in the printing process of the cover or later only behind the cover of that book with various printing technologies. In fact, as seen in the studies, developments in the field of technology is experienced so quickly that traditional ex-libris works pasted on the inner cover of the books will give its place to animation/animated examples added to electronic books in the virtual environment.

Although ex-libris, as per its main principles, is a work designed on order intended to be added to the back of the book covers, in communities where there is not much demand, ex-libris artists design ex-libris on behalf of other ex-libris artists whom they value, often to exchange with them, to add it to their own collections and also to exhibit because of their need to maintain the life of these artistic indicators and to reveal their creations by this method. Ex-libris, which is reproduced from exclusive works, each named and signed with the artist’s original handwriting and also sealed by some artists with their special stamps is to be an artistic item most appropriate for exchange because it is small in size – especially to be exchanged between ex-libris artists – therefore can quickly become a part of important

collections.

### Definition

In relation to ex-libris, which is a Latin word and whose English equivalent is tried to be interpreted as “from the library of...” (Pektaş, 2003), “from the bookcase of ...” (Pektaş, 2014), a wide variety of definitions have been made as in other conceptions and terms. For example Hasip Pektaş who is a graphic/visual communication designer, an ex-libris artist, an academician who has an international recognition and success in this context and undertakes important and valuable responsibilities for the settlement of ex-libris in Turkey has defined ex-libris as “...small-sized lithographs pasted to the inner cover of the books on which the owner’s name takes place” (Pektaş, 2015, p. 78), as well as; “...small-sized lithographs that the booklovers paste on the inner cover of their books, which bear their names and pictures of different subjects” (Pektaş, 2003, p. 11).

Again, according to Pektaş (2015, p. 81), “ex-libris is made for living persons or institutions on order, it reflects their properties. Ex-libris can be reproduced with gravure, woodcut, linoleum, lithography, silkscreen, offset printing, photographic techniques and can be designed with computer aid. Ex-libris is a work of art which everyone can own, touch, and share.”

Academician/visual communication designer Banu İnanç Uyan Dur who has made research on ex-libris and applications in this context says, “Besides being created on behalf of a person or institution ... as a sign of ownership of the book, ex-libris is an art work introducing the book’s owner. For this reason, properties of the person whom it is designed for are tried to be reflected in the work.” (inanç Uyan Dur, 2016, s. 123).

In Istanbul Ex-libris Society’s web page (<http://www.aed.org.tr/tr/>) ex-libris is implied as a sign of ownership which is pasted in the inner cover of books and is also defined as a product designed along the interest and fancy of the owner of the book, - not on behalf of its writer; but on behalf of the person or institution who owns books in library - a warning about the returning of the borrowed books, a document about a measure against “theft” and even a deed of the books.

While the word “ex-libris” is written before or after the name of the person for whom it is designed or elsewhere in the design usually in accordance with the visual data in the design or with the original approach of the designer, it is also possible to encounter exceptional practices in this context. For instance in the work designed on behalf of George Hering



**Image 1:** A view from the ex-libris designed for George Hering bearing the writing “one of his books” instead of “ex-libris”

(Image 1); instead of the word “ex-libris”, the typographical indication “one of his books” written on it is one of these examples.

While these designs with theme are commonly implied with the word “Ex-libris” in the world which are also known as the sticky labels; its equivalent is “bookplate” in English.

The designing of these artistic works as original works in which high aesthetic concerns come forward, which are mostly referred to as “Ex-libris” in Turkish narratives is very important for the readers in terms of meeting artworks with high artistic qualities and consequently being encouraged for arts and art galleries.

As is also easily understood from the definitions given above, although everyone who has made an effort in the theoretical or practical way with regard to the subject has mentioned ex-libris with diverse specific clauses - which “emerged as a necessity of ownership with the invention of printing press and the ability of reproduction of the books” (Öz Pektaş, 2017) -, the definitions made about Ex-libris all in essence meet in this main definition: **Ex-libris is a small-sized artistic work which tells who the book that it is attached on belongs to.**

Given that ex-libris is the indicator which signifies who the book that it is attached on belongs to, it is useful to mention the concept of indicator briefly:

Indicator is a meaningful unit. Based on the definitions and explanations made in various sources (Berger, 2016, Başkan, 1988, Rifat, 2000, Sayın, 2001) every element that describes something outside of itself is an indicator. According to Mehmet Rifat, who is known for his research on semiotics, books, translations, each of the “phenomena, objects, forms” that can replace the content that they reflect (Rifat, 2000, p. 129) is defined as indicator since they are meaningful elements.

The science that examines indicators both within themselves and in terms of their relations with other indicators is Semiology (Guiraud, 2016). The meanings of the indicators can only be examined and determined by semiotic approaches. The approaches used in semiotic examinations (Parsa and Parsa, 2012) are semantic, syntactic, and functionally and beneficially exploratory pragmatic approaches. With semantic approach, the meaning or meanings of the indicator; the characteristics and effects of the composition in the context of sequential interrelation of the elements forming the indicator; and with pragmatic approach, to what extent the indicators function and provide the intended utility can be examined (Sayın, 2007, p. 1018).

## Substance

Since ex-libris is a design often placed just behind the front cover of books, it has very important functions especially in terms of book lovers' encounter and meeting with art. It is evident from the definitions and explanations that ex-libris, as a signifier of the owner of the books on which it is added to, is a valuable work of art which implies that;

- 'The book' on which it is placed is very special for the owner,
- The said 'book owner' values and gives importance to art /design,
- The person who finds or holds the book with ex-libris on its cover should bring it to its owner,
- Dimension is not a decisive value criterion in art; small sized works can also be very valuable,
- It can easily be collected and exchanged because of its small size,
- It has features that can easily spread in terms of artistic sharing,
- It also functions as the deed and the label of the book on which it is placed,
- It has very important functions in terms of readers' encounters with art; thus contributing to the increase of interest in art,
- It is a very important indicator due to several indications that it bears giving information about the designer,
- It is very important and therefore necessary for modern life since it has highly qualified functions as an artistic indicator implying and providing that it is also a very important indicator of the person whom it is designed for due to a variety of denotations that it bears giving information about the person who had it made and added it to his/her books.

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**Image 2:** A view from the ex-libris designed for the library of Amenhotep III applied to tile surface around 1400 BC (62 x 38 x 4,5 mm)

## Development and Examinations in Brief

According to various sources (Pektaş, 2003; Keenan, 2003), the oldest ex-libris encountered so far is said to be the work that is applied to a light blue tile surface for the library of King of Egypt Amenhotep III, (in some sources written as Amenophis III) dated to 1400 BC (Image 2).

It has been said that, during times when there was no printing press yet, some indicators (blazons, etc.) special to the book owners were added to covers of some of only a few manuscripts (Pektaş, 2014; Hanrath, 1977). One of the earliest ex-libris works dating back to the 1400s is reputed to be of a flower biting hedgehog (Image 3) (Hanrath, 1977) designed for German priest Johannes Knabenberg, known for his nickname Hedgehog (Igler). In this design, while the nickname of the person whom the ex-libris is designed for is referred to with the use of a hedgehog, a message which implies what the borrower may face - in case the book is not brought - is given with the sentence "Hans Igler, the hedge hog may kiss you / Hans Igler, das dich ein



Image 3: A view from the ex-libris designed for Hans Igler around 1450's, 140x190mm.

Igel kuss", placed in a band drawn on the empty space at the top of the design.

It is estimated that there are more than three million ex-libris examples and more than two thousand ex-libris collections brought about to date (Pektaş, 2015, p. 81). Albrecht Dürer, Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, and Gustav Klimt are among the artists who designed exlibris and some names such as Julian Dimitrov Jordanov, Yuri Nozdrin, Oleg Denisenko, Martin R. Baeyens and Hasip Pektaş are some of today's ex-libris artists.

When examples of ex-libris that have been designed from the beginning until today are examined, as there are works that give ideas about the designer's style and name/seal, however in which there is no perceptible message about the people who they were made for other than their names, it is also possible to encounter a large number of examples consisting of indicators implying concepts that can be easily perceived about the people whom they are designed for. In fact, the concern of ex-libris designers about signifying the people whom they make the design for in their works has begun to increase so much that especially in recent years examples have been encountered in which the portrait of the person for whom ex-libris is designed is to dominate the composition (Image 4).

In the ex-libris that was designed with a delicate workmanship and objective realistic approach on behalf of Luc van den Briele by Şükrü Ertürk in the year of 2000 (Image 4), at first sight a human portrait looking at us consisting of circles within an order is in question. When examined, even though it can be

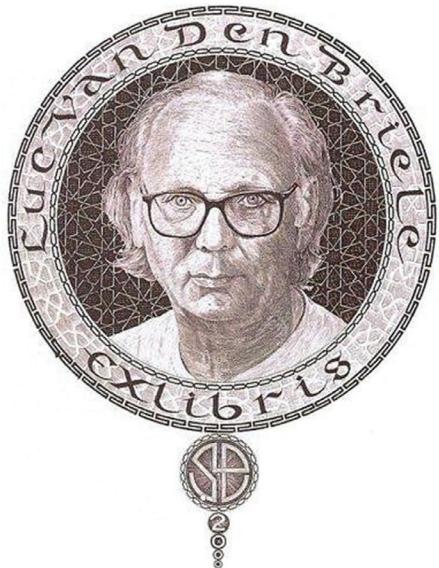
clearly seen that this portrait is an image reminding of Luc van den Briele, it is not very perceivable what the circles imply at first. By analyzing carefully taking into consideration the year of 2000 when the design was made (it was said by Şükrü Ertürk in the interview made with him that the planets during that period were in sequential order) it can be made out that the circles could be seen as indicators of earth and the other planets and within this context that the designer considered the person and wanted to make him be considered as a ‘cosmopolitan’. At the same time it can be perceived from the design in question having a style in shape of a mirror that the designer who loves playing ‘bağlama’ (instrument with three double strings) and singing folk songs was also influenced by the verse of Poet Daimi that reads “I am a human being whereas I am the mirror of the universe.” It can be additionally said that the texture of the circular area surrounding the portrait which is the principal indicator of the design includes indicators that can be evaluated as Seljuk star texture.

While we have thousands of ex-libris examples that were created with various determiners in order to signify the artist who ex-libris is designed for, the ex-libris designed by designer Hasip Pektaş for the musician Hikmet Şimşek, who was a conductor, an academician, a state artist with an international reputation and success who made valuable contributions for the settlement of classical music in Turkey (Image 5) is one of the indicators worth to be examined thoroughly. If approached by the theme Ex-libris, As an Artist Indicator, “artist” indicator in the said design should be examined under two topics: a) The artist who designs the ex-libris / ex-libris artist, b) The artist for whom the ex-libris is designed / artist who owns the library.

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### Artist who designs ex-libris

Ex-libris artist is the person who is a graphic designer, a visual communication designer, a painter, namely who has been proven to be exclusive in plastic arts field. While ex-libris artists constitute indicators signifying the person who the ex-libris is to be designed for, they have a sense of a unique visualization of these images and an effort to compose/integrate them with the required typographic elements. Since the basic principle of being an artist requires having a self proven, new and original narrative style, the basic condition for calling an ex-libris designer an ex-libris artist is his/her presentation of original ex-libris works and keeping continuity in this field. In this context, just as every person who paints is not a painting artist; it is useful to state that everybody who designs ex-libris is not an exlibris artist.



**Image 4:** A view from the ex-libris designed for ex-libris theoretician and collector Luc Van Den Briele by Şükrü Ertürk who is also known as a banknote designer, in the year of 2000, 100x80mm.

### **Artist whom ex-libris is designed for**

Artists who ex-libris is designed for by ex-libris artists are distinguished people with their artist qualities within the framework of their artistic works. These works can be from plastic areas such as painting, sculpture, graphic design, ceramics, as well as from literature field such as poetry, story, and novel. Also cinema, theater, music; in short all art fields can be evaluated within this context. Again the principles ought to be known within this context is that the person to be considered as an artist has to be accepted with his/her artistic quality/genius and to be someone who creates original art works. Ex-libris can certainly be practiced for people who have special books and desire to add aesthetic labels to these books as indicators of "ownership" whereas the main subject of this research was determined under the theme "ex-libris as an artist's indicator"; therefore artists for whom ex-libris is designed were chosen for detailed examination.

Ex-libris works, when examined as artists' indicators by approaching from the two aspects explained above; as well as being indicators bearing various meanings about the artists who design them they also appear as meaningful indicators that could also be handled as indicators including various meanings about the artists for whom the design is made.

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Ex-libris works as indicators of the designing artist can be examined in terms of similarities and differences between the styles of the artist's selected and other works, similarities and differences between the artist's and other ex-libris artists' works, the artist's sense of art / style, and qualities they bear as exclusive works.

As an indicator of the artist for whom ex-libris is designed, it can be examined in terms of which characteristics of the artist it implies. These characteristics can be; the name of the artist for whom the ex-libris is designed, his/her thoughts, beliefs, likes, intentions, sex, life style, race, occupation, achievements, etc.

Based on the explanations made above, it is firstly required to determine information such as; by whom the ex-libris works to be examined were designed, for whom they were designed, their design year, technique and sizes, how many copies were printed and the rank of print among all other copies, whether attached to a book or belonging to a collection, if attached to a book, information about the book, if belongs to a collection, whose and which collection they belong to. Following these determinations, examination of artwork can be practiced as indicators of the ex-libris designer artist and the artist for whom the ex-libris was designed.

With reference to the information given above the ex-libris that was designed by Hasip Pektaş for the library of Hikmet Şimşek (Image 5) can be examined as the following:

*Artist who designed the ex-libris: Hasip Pektaş*

*Artist for whom the ex-libris was designed: Hikmet Şimşek*

*Date that the ex-libris was designed: 1997*

*Technique used: X3 / Linocut*

*Size: 100x75 mm*

*Number of reproduced copies: 100 copies*

*Rank of the print among the signed copies: Insignificant*

*Attached to a book / belonging to a collection: 51 copies out of the printed works were delivered to Hikmet Şimşek, most of which were attached to books while others continue to make contribution to aesthetic life in Frederikshavn Museum in Denmark, Sint-Niklaas Museum in Belgium, İstanbul Ex-libris Museum in Turkey, at their designers and some of them at collectors.*

*Book(s) that it is attached to: Insignificant*

*Collection that it belongs to: Insignificant*

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### **Summary about Hikmet Şimşek**

Hikmet Şimşek was a musician, a conductor, an academician, a state artist with an international reputation and success who made valuable contributions for the settlement of classical music in Turkey.



**Image 5:** A view from the ex-libris designed for the library of Hikmet Şimşek by Hasip Pektaş, X5, 100x75mm, 1997

### **Summary about Hasip Pektaş**

Hasip Pektaş is an ex-libris artist, a graphic/visual communication designer, an academician with an international recognition and success who has been undertaking a principle role for the settlement of ex-libris in Turkey.

### **Evaluation**

In order to be able to make qualified semiological evaluations on graphic design works and/or products, it is required to determine and identify the indicators in the designs being examined. In this context for a qualified evaluation of the ex-libris themed Hikmet Şimşek designed by Hasip Pektaş it would be useful at least to determine and express the basic indicators in the examined design.

Regarding the data required for examination, the basic indicators of the

ex-libris design to be examined presented in Image 5 can be listed as the writing “Ex-libris Hasip Pektaş”, “HP” logo, a window whose both wings are open, horizontal lines placed on upper half of the open window with images of birds landed on them, and an image of a conductor faced towards the window.

*The possible meanings of these indicators can be explained as follows:*

*The writing “Ex-libris Hikmet Şimşek”:* Could both mean an ex-libris designed on behalf of Hikmet Şimşek and also the book to which this ex-libris is added is from Hikmet Şimşek’s library.

*“HP” logo:* This indicator including the first letters of Hasip Pektaş means the said ex-libris was designed by Hasip Pektaş.

*Wide open window:* Implies a personality and effectiveness from inside to the outer world, towards everybody and everything.

*Horizontal lines occupying the upper half of the open window:* It can be said that this series of indicators consisting of five lines and four equal spaces was used to mean the staff.

*Bird images over the horizontal lines:* These indicators implying the crow family imply the choir singers forming the orchestra.

*Conductor image:* The conductor (Hikmet Şimşek) was considered as directing an orchestra whose choir members are crows.

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With reference to the interpretations of indicators above, the ex-libris designed by Hasip Pektaş for Hikmet Şimşek as an indicator of the person for whom it was designed can shortly be assessed as follows: In this composition in which a conductor is implied as if, while conducting an orchestra in a concert hall, he turns to the crows which hear the sound of music and land in front of the window and he makes music also with them, it was expressed that; music, as a universal artistic activity, is a qualified branch of art which cannot be bounded by enclosed spaces and with the window open to the world, Hikmet Şimşek is a universal globalized arts man who has been performing activities throughout the world. Although it is firstly signified with the writing “EX-LIBRIS HİKMET ŞİMŞEK” lined up like two arms spread over the wings of the window that the ex-libris was designed for Hikmet Şimşek, just like interpreting Mevlana’s precious universal quote “... come; whatever you are”, it was tried to state that aesthetic works can be performed also with crows and/or even crows could tend towards something good.

As for the indicator of the designer (Hasip Pektaş) of the ex-libris in question, with this design in which he used clear indicators by utilizing the bare quality and effect of black and white, he can be interpreted to have

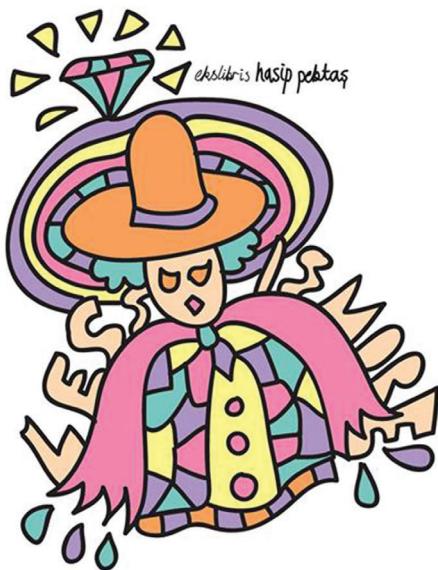
a personality who has a bare narrative language (that he is a defender of the opinion “less is more”), believes in the universality of arts and that it makes life more beautiful, values contemporary life, art and artists, and is a defender of qualified universal values. For this particular work of the artist it can be stated that it bears characteristics alike with his other similar works in terms of basic principles within the context of using bare narrative language and that it has a narrative style of the artist’s own.

In order to intensify the approach of examining ex-libris as the indicator of the artist, by also taking into consideration the subjective originality and difference, it would be useful to examine one more example of ex-libris to make the matter clearer.

Hasip Pektaş who had designed ex-libris for another artist as considered above from the aspect of subjective originality, can be evaluated this time as the artist for whom ex-libris is designed. Hasip Pektaş, as someone whose name has been distinguished because of being an ex-libris designer, his very important effort to endear and spread ex-libris and being the head of İstanbul Ex-libris Society, comes first among the people for whom ex-libris is designed in Turkey.

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Based on the theme explained above, among many examples of ex-libris designed for Hasip Pektaş it would be useful to examine the ex-libris designed by İrem Çamlıca (Image 6) who won the gold medal in Design category in BIWC 2014 which was held in Sofia and who was the winner of Saint Petersburg First International Ex-libris Competition.



*Artist who designed the ex-libris: İrem Çamlıca*

*Artist for whom the ex-libris was designed: Hasip Pektaş*

*Date that the ex-libris was designed: 2012*

*Technique used: CGD*

*Size: 95x73mm*

*Number of reproduced copies: 20*

*Rank of the print among the signed copies: Insignificant*

*Attached to a book / belonging to a collection: Insignificant*

*Book(s) that it is attached to: Insignificant*

*Collection that it belongs to: Insignificant*

### **Summary about Hasip Pektaş**

Hasip Pektaş is an ex-libris artist, a graphic/visual communication designer, an academician with an international recognition and success who has been undertaking a principle role for the settlement of ex-libris in Turkey.

**Image 6:** A view from the ex-libris designed for the library of Hasip Pektaş by İrem Çamlıca CGD (Computer Generated Design), 95x73mm, 2012

## Summary about İrem Çamlıca

İrem Çamlıca is a visual communication designer who has attracted attention at a young age with her designs, activities she had performed, and international prizes she had won.

### Evaluation

With reference to the data required for examination, the basic indicators of the ex-libris design to be examined presented in Image 6 can be listed as; the writings “Ex-libris Hasip Pektaş” and “Less is more”, a gleaming diamond indicator, a fedora hat, long and wavy hair over flowing from the hat, a foulard, a tie, droplets, a graphical style with multi elements / multi colors based on stained glass-styled geometrical shapes.

*The possible meanings of these indicators can be explained as follows:*

The writing “*Ex-libris Hasip Pektaş*”: Could mean both an ex-libris designed for Hasip Pektaş; and could also mean that the book bearing this ex-libris is from the library of Hasip Pektaş.

The writing “*Less is more*”: Implies that simplicity tells more in design.

The gleaming diamond: Could be interpreted as “value”.

Fedora hat: Could be interpreted as an indicator of “style”

Foulard: Could be interpreted as an indicator of “style”

Tie: Could be interpreted as the person who is the subject of the design works in an official job and/or wears official clothes or wears a tie.

Long and wavy hair: Implies the hairstyle which Hasip Pektaş once had.

Droplets: Could be considered as indicators of “water”, “sweat”, “state of being energetic” and “activeness”.

*Narrative style with multi elements / multi colors based on stained glass-styled geometrical shapes*: Could be interpreted as indicators implying the designing language of the designer of the ex-libris or maybe the personality of the person for whom the design is made.

With reference to the interpretations of indicators above, the ex-libris designed by İrem Çamlıca for Hasip Pektaş as an indicator of the person for whom it was designed can shortly be assessed as follows:

In this ex-libris designed for Hasip Pektaş it was emphasized that; fedora hat and foulard are irreplaceably important clothes (dressing style) for Hasip Pektaş; he works in an official job and/or occasionally wears official clothes or wears a tie; the person in question with wavy and long hair at his back and an energetic nature, has an active and colorful character; with the written indicator “less is more” he has a way of thinking defending simplicity in

narration and that it is crucial to express many things with a few indicators; with the gleaming diamond he is a very valuable person (the designer of the ex-libris İrem Çamlıca has even said on the matter "... the diamond placed above his portrait symbolizes the value he owns for his countless students."

When the ex-libris in question is evaluated as the indicator of the person who designed it; it can be said that İrem Çamlıca considers issues generally with a synthesist analysis in her designs with a narrative style having multi elements / multi colors based on stained glass-styled geometrical shapes and has the potential to express in multicolored and polyphonic ways and in this context, intends to create focus for the attention of the observer however with the forms that she created with oval curves and bends she has quite a modest subjectivity.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As understood by the explanations and examinations made, when ex-libris is seen as a qualified indicator of both the designers and the people for whom it is designed, it turns out to be one of the most important artistic indicators that people (especially book lovers) could encounter at most unexpected moments, in terms of art and works of art.

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The persons who add ex-libris to their books are individuals, who love to read, write, and own books, arts therefore people / life. As these subjective individuals having such qualities would have no intention to hurt others at all, they make contributions to the increase of contemporary people having high level of empathy by; helping to create qualified conversation environments based on information acquired by reading and making others read, creating awareness within the context of the importance of bringing back the borrowed items and supporting the increase of the number of people who find the opportunity to come across with the language of art by the help of their books to which ex-libris is added.

Other than the benefits tried to be listed above, the people who add ex-libris to their books contribute to another very important social benefit by having ex-libris artists design works of ex-libris and making more books bear artistic works and in this regard they encourage ex-libris artists who ensure that people encounter arts more often.

Works of ex-libris are aesthetic indicators of both the designer and people for whom they are designed. Therefore it is extremely important in terms of contribution to aesthetic life that people who have the potential to design ex-libris create ex-libris - without expecting orders for the people of science,

arts and culture who value books and art; for every library owner who deserve to meet qualified values - by presenting them to the related people, or giving them as a gift, contributing to collections by exchanging, opening exhibitions in this regard, thus making ex-libris designing sustainable as a life style.

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