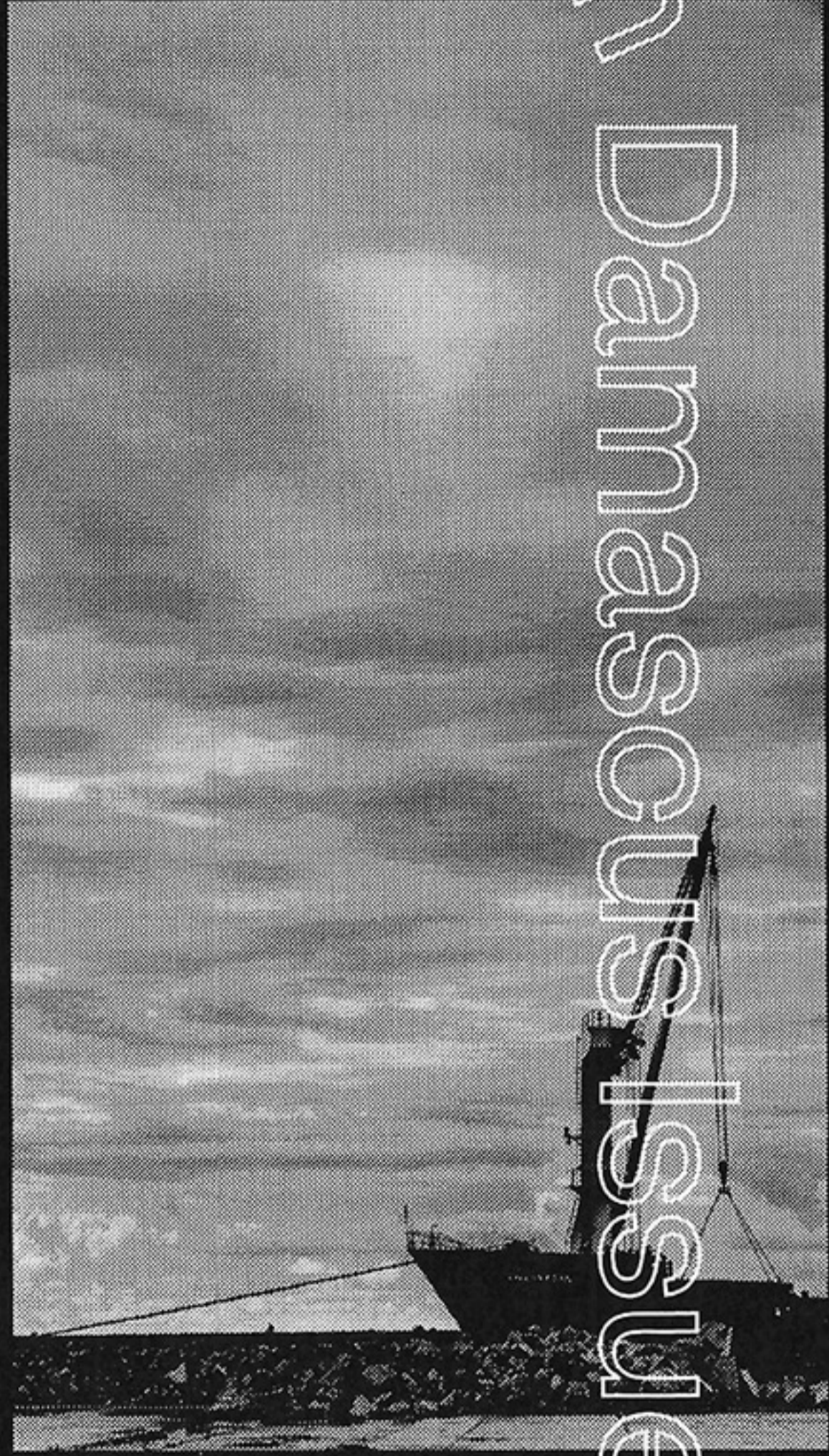
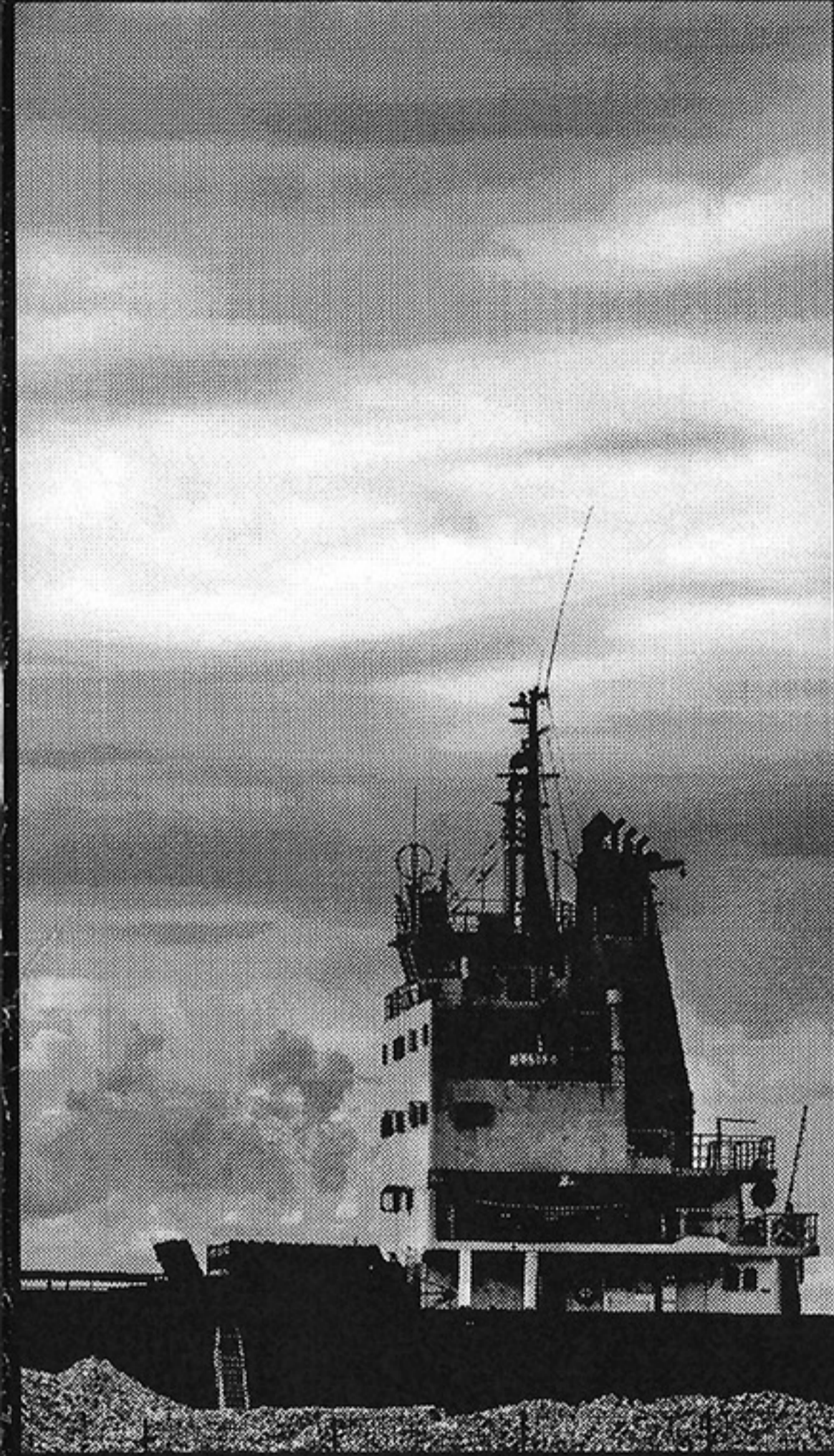


Apricots from

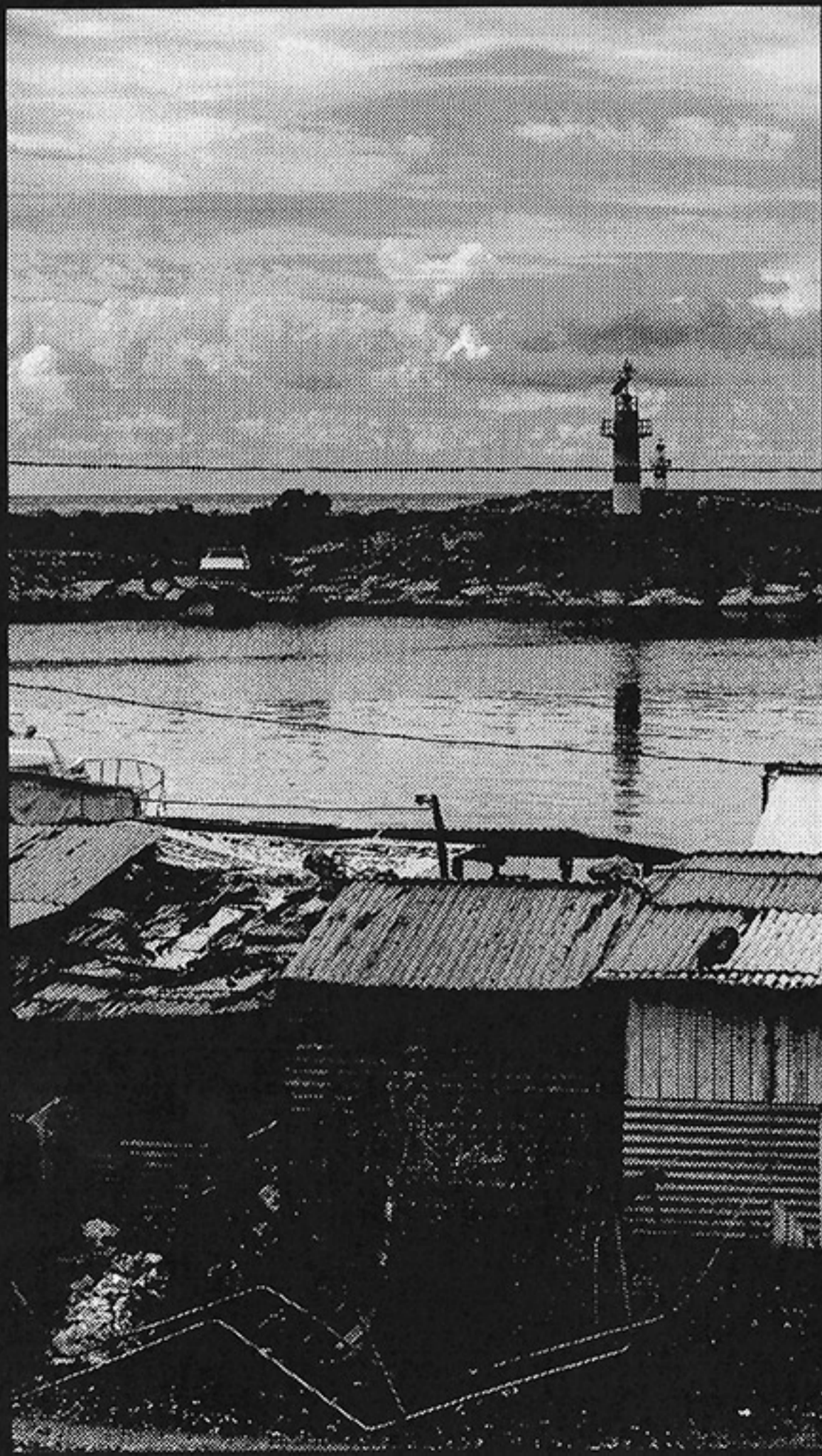
Darmasous Issue 14

by Aras Özgün, iz!



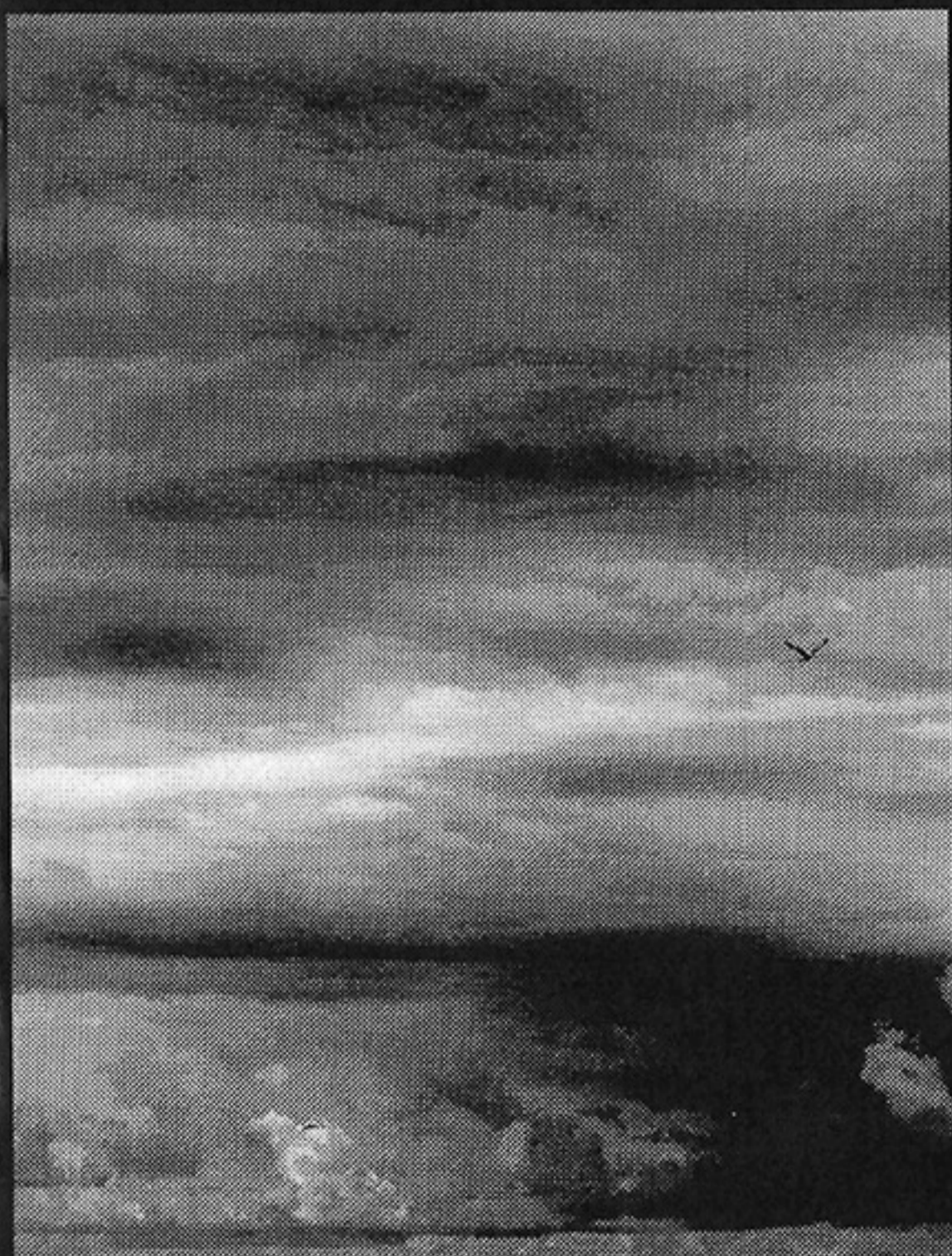
I left my father's hometown on the Black Sea coast a few months after the military coup, not knowing that it would take so long to go back there. I was eleven years old when I left; so many things that you remember from childhood start to fit into their places and make sense only after you grow up. For example, as a kid I knew that "fascism" was a bad thing, but it was only much later that I figured out why, that year, all of a sudden, people stopped cursing it in public.

"Children's playground" did not exist as a concept then; we used to play on the rocks at the seaside, in the backyards of country houses, in the narrow alleys separating them, and, preferably, in the old cemetery behind Demas's shabby corner store, which was turned into a weirdly terraced playing field after the gravestones were removed. Nobody knew or cared much about whose unmarked graves we were playing soccer on. We would stop by Demas' store before going back home after the match.



Against our parents' consent, on adventurous days we would extend our playground toward the ruins of the abandoned church, inside which the moldy air was thick with the smell of urine, shit, and dust. Ruins of abandoned churches were scattered throughout the central neighborhoods of the town, in the vicinity of large stone buildings and mansions that stood out among the indistinct modest country houses and newer concrete apartment blocks. Only one church was still intact and in use as a children's library, which became one of my favorite hangouts after I had learned to read.

Some of the kids I played with lived in those stone mansions; they also came from the "older" families of the town. One of them was this chubby freckle-faced kid, with whom I shared my desk at school from time to time. His family owned a car dealership, but that wasn't their only source of prestige; he was the grandson of a national hero, "Topal Osman" (Osman the Hobbler).





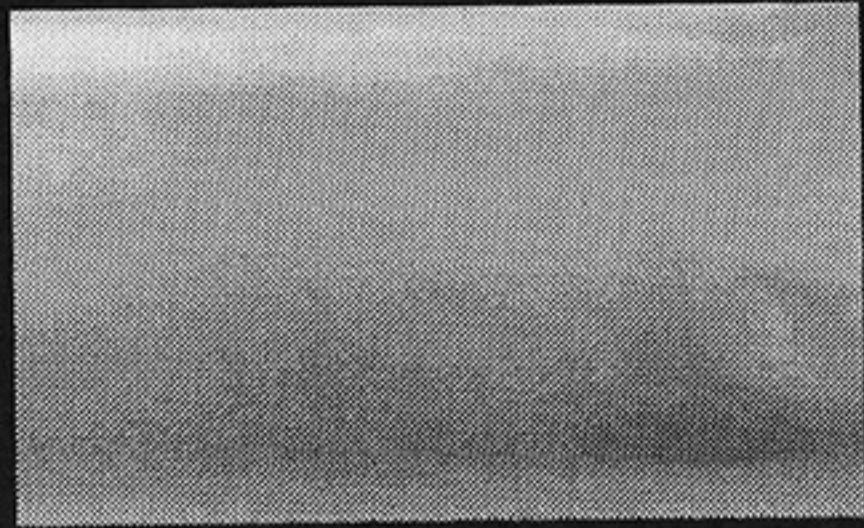
Topal Osman was buried on top of the citadel overlooking the city, his marble tomb stood next to the old cannon that pointed toward Russia across the sea.

Topal Osman's sword hung proudly on the wall at my friend's house, and no other kid, no other house had that kind of prestige. My great-grandfather was a veteran of the liberation war too, but all that was left to my grandmother was a small golden medallion attached to some silly red ribbon, something you could actually buy at the flea market because after the war most veterans sold them for their value in gold. But, Topal Osman's huge shiny sword hung spectacularly alone in the middle of the big empty stone wall, and it meant something.



It was much later when I worked with a German filmmaker who was tracing her Greek grandfather's deportation from the Black Sea to Greece, that I came across Topal Osman's name again. I had to translate an interview she made with a ninety-year old villager from the Black Sea who couldn't recall coherently anything related to the fighting between the Greek and Turkish gangs after the fall of the Ottoman central authority. In the middle of her incomprehensible murmurs the old woman paused for a moment, consumed with a terrifying image; she mumbled: "And then, there was Topal Osman, he was worse than the Greeks." I had to rewind the tape over and over to make sure that she was indeed mentioning the name of my hometown's local hero.

The town had changed a lot since I left. The abandoned churches that once smelled of piss, shit and dust had been restored, and opened to tourism as historical sites. Fancy apartment blocks had risen on the once empty cemetery. Topal Osman's marble grave did not stand out quite as magnificently as before, within the newly restored walls of the citadel.



I asked my uncle who was showing me around and telling me about the old days, “What happened to the Greeks?”—as if I didn’t know. His blue eyes looked away, “None are left, all went away” he said, as if he didn’t know. “What about Demas, isn’t he Greek?” I asked sincerely. He smiled, “Well, Demas is not his real name. He used to be a fisherman. Before you were born, he was selling at that little store the fish he caught. He called his store “Deniz Mahsulleri Satış” (Seafood Sales Store), but the tiny storefront didn’t have enough space for the whole title, so he shortened it to “De.Ma.S.”

Paul Klee, in order to dismiss the tired question “is art for the people, or for the sake of art?” from an avant-garde position, once said that “art is for the people who are not there yet.” In that case, photographs —always arrested somewhere between the past and the present— are for the people who are not there anymore.



Small, illegible text, likely a caption or credit line, located below the collage of photographs.

This artwork is produced on the occasion of *Apricots from Damascus*

<http://apricotsfromdamascus.net>

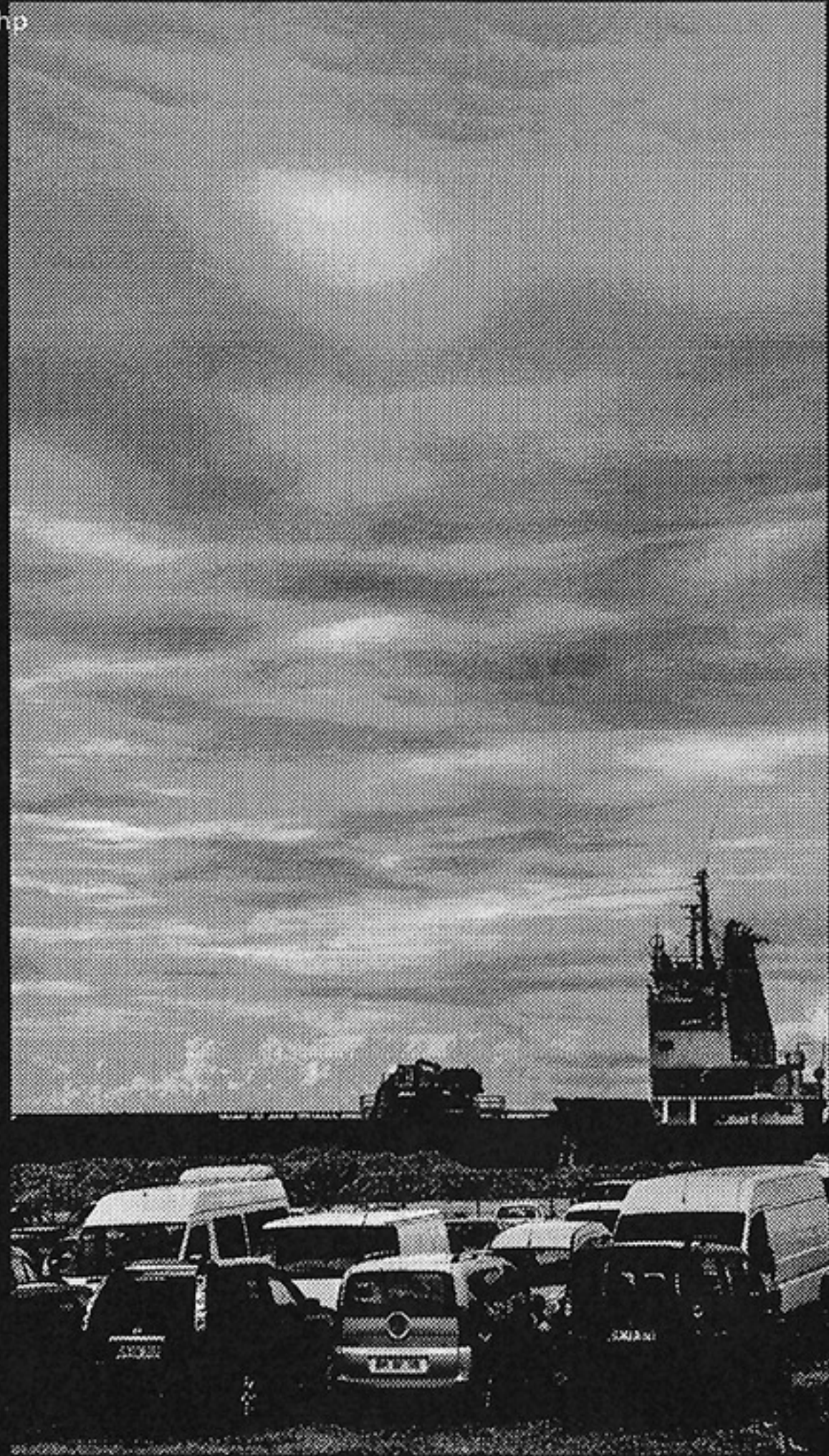
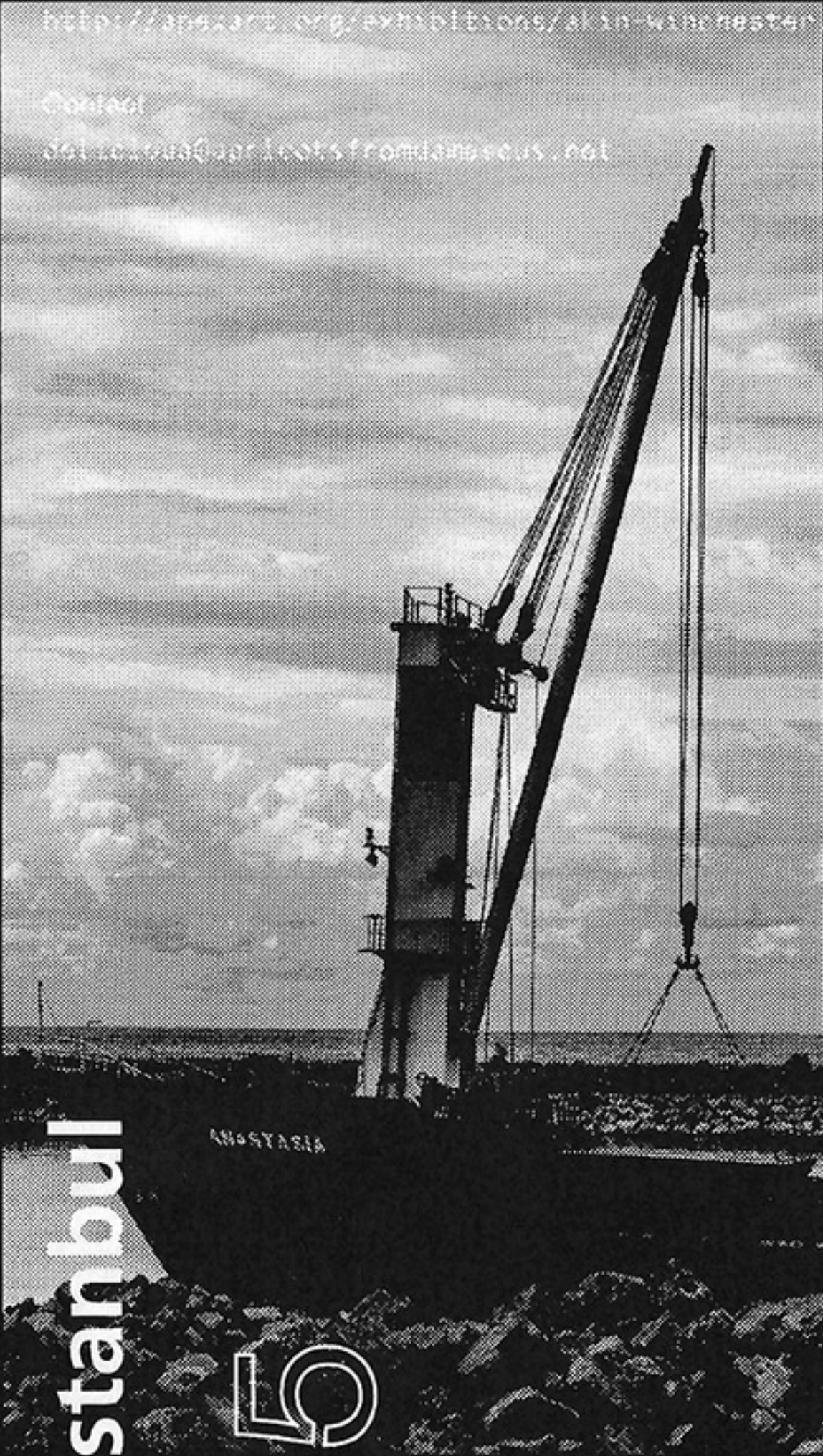
Apricots from Damascus is an apexart Franchise Exhibition organized by

Atif Akin and Dilek Winchester. For more information, visit us at

<http://apexart.org/exhibitions/akin-winchester.php>

Contact

atifik@apricotsfromdamascus.net



apexart - istanbul

2015

December, İzmir