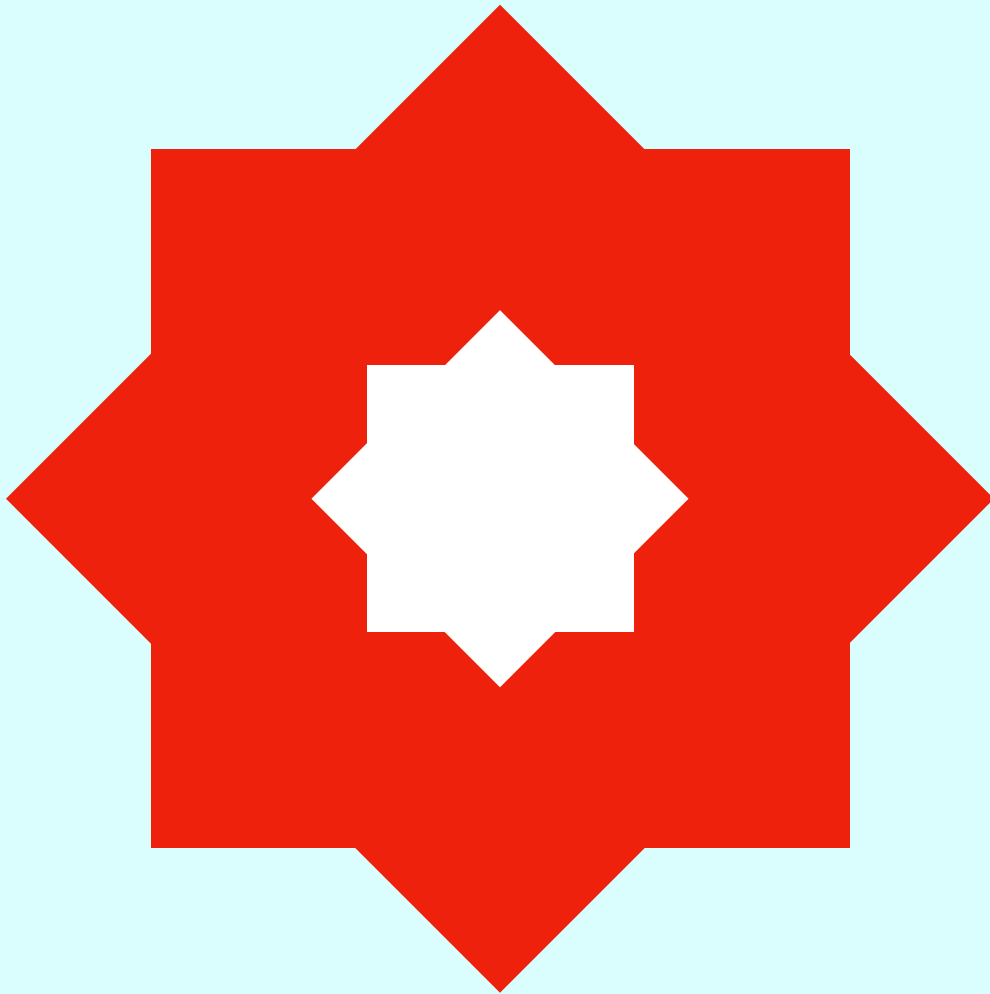


# Daily Morning

Art Writing in Turkey  
2017-2022



Mena Hem  
translated by Otto Mann

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## *Foreword*

For five years, the writer met the death of lines imposed like political boundaries, marking economic turns. And he slugged, toward each weekly knockout, racked by an order of shame that, like all workers, he bore silently, between bouts of consciousness, working up the sand to spit in the face of they who would cut out his tongue and serve it to his enemies, heavily salted and buttered to taste.

So, wounded by the passage of time that lacerates the mind with its lightning strikes of natural trickery, the mythic scope of perspective that raged in the writer's vision had to do with the conception of art, and all that its pathologies imply, toward the health of a floating emissary, who, swimming to the other shore, finds a shipwreck with no survivors, repairs the mast, and embarks on a quest like that of the Odyssey, into the mystery of emotional space, lured by the perception of all in each specific object distinct according to color and form, definition, whether literary or imagistic, and the haze of remembrance that entangles meaning with experience, he reached for the bitten apple of Eden's serpent and recoiled, poisoned by the slithering hiss of a body unkind to his presence.

These were surreal entries into the mission of being, as a hand and an eye, when walking around in a city of new friends and old histories, he wandered and told tales of his own, wanting to see, to open his eyes and dream under the opaque veils of liberal hypocrisy and fundamentalist dogma, for a voice of his own.

That these articles, essayistic, venture into the realm of poetry, for their interpretations of legend in the sagas of such ancient horror as I've known, we listen, then, to the searching for letters, in the darkness behind barriers of language and culture, foregoing rights of citizenship and foreign to the bleak masses who swarmed to feast on the virgin meat of that quiet poise, his seeing, as present, toward an alternate knowing, of the world, but not in it, motivated by need and patient with his own bafflement, that people are what they make, of each other, each creative, a will, forces of nature, in and out of their elements.

Here's to the poet who became a writer, then forced his way into journalism to survive on the leftovers of what artists have thrown away for sale.

Otto Mann  
July 23, 2023  
Istanbul

**2017**

## Raven

“After the Armenian dinner  
Make love to a Greek woman  
In a Jewish bed.”

Kuzguncuk Proverb

Across the Bosphorus opposite Ortaköy, the quaint and colorful neighborhood of Kuzguncuk still possesses the nostalgic air known by locals as the remnants of old Istanbul. In the past, every lush avenue and verdant backyard was overflowing with edible gardens, and neighbors swam together on a shore front that was cleaner and abundant with fish that simply tasted better.

Overpopulation and construction seems to have changed the face of daily life for a city full of proud multi-generational and interfaith families who have shared the same holidays and seasons, lived in the same homes and streets, and loved the same children and elders.

The quintessential Kuzguncuk saying, “After the Armenian dinner, make love to a Greek woman in a Jewish bed,” was told to Turkish architect and poet Cengiz Bektaş in 1991 by a fellow Kuzguncuk resident named Çetin.

Bektaş transcribed his conversations with Çetin and his Jewish wife Victoria, along with many other Kuzguncuk locals for his book, *The Other Name for Tolerance: Kuzguncuk*, published in 2003. He made it his life's work to restore the charm of his beloved Kuzguncuk by reintroducing the neighborhood to its historic soul, where Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Muslims lived and prayed in harmony.

Urban researcher Amy Mills wrote about Bektaş and his neighborhood restoration project in her 2010 book, *Streets of Memory*, where she details his efforts in preserving the interfaith fabric as a dedication to the Old City of Jerusalem, with its neighborhoods divided among the same four historic communities. The architecture of Kuzguncuk has been restored with creative aesthetic, as Mills articulated, "To make it act as the natural theater for the collective memory of the *mahalle*." (In Turkish, *mahalle* means neighborhood.)

Kuzguncuk is truly a theatrical *mahalle*, a veritable stage with its storefront characters, pampered strays, conspicuous intellectuals and photo-happy sightseers. It has inspired great literature, having been the setting for novels such as *Mediterranean Waltz* by Buket Uzuner and *Bir Kuzgun Yaz* (A Raven Summer) by Mehmet Ünver and short stories, including *Aahh Canım Kuzguncuk* (Ohh Dear Kuzguncuk) by Nedret Ebcim, among others. One of the streets is named after the television series "Perihan Abla," which pioneered the mahalle setting for public broadcast.

İcadiye Avenue is the sole artery of the neighborhood, where five central art galleries and a performing arts center surround the *bostan*, or community garden. The garden is the chief

accomplishment of the Kuzguncuk Neighborhood Association, which has been organizing intellectuals, artists and activists, many of them women, since 2000, to preserve the residential valley between Nakkaştepe Hill and Fethi Paşa Korusu Forest in the heart of the local community. Without a single bar, its nightlife instills a village ambiance, as neighbors crowd the few lamp-lit cafes every evening.

Yet, the pinnacle of Kuzguncuk lies around the corner where the street names İcadiye, Perihan Abla, and Üryanizade meet in a rare nexus of interfaith urbanization. From the steps of Bereketli Street, where Karagöz theaters have traditionally delighted neighborhood children, the domes of Yeni Cami mosque and the oldest Armenian church in Istanbul are nearly indistinguishable. And at street level a block away, Beth Yaakov Synagogue stands beside a barber, taxi stand, kebab joint, green grocer and Agios Georgios Greek Orthodox Church.

The Stars of David decorating Beth Yaakov are visible from the main thoroughfare where the neighborhood meets the Bosphorus, as is its Hebrew-engraved stone mantle that rests atop two thick metal doors and a security checkpoint. It is one of two synagogues in Kuzguncuk sharing territory with co-religionists from Bet Nissim on nearby Yakup Street.

The inner sanctuary of Beth Yaakov Synagogue features a beautiful mural depicting the geography of Israel, said to have been drawn by a Persian calligrapher. The synagogue was painstakingly restored seventeen years ago. Now, its exquisitely carved wooden Torah ark and embellished interiors are exactly as its oldest congregants remember.

Turkish-Jewish historian Rifat N. Bali wrote of old Kuzguncuk in his book, *The Silent Minority in Turkey*, published in 2013 and recounting how Greeks and Jews often settled near the shore, while Armenians lived uphill by Nakkaştepe where delinquents would face off out of sight of the local police station. They gathered at the Kuzguncuk pier after-hours for a film.

Dr. Seyfi İşman, the father of Nisya İşman Allovi, director of the Jewish Museum of Turkey, remembers his family patriarch screening the golden age of Hollywood there for the early 20th century community.

In her novel *Mediterranean Waltz*, Buket Uzuner describes Kuzguncuk as a Jewish village on the Bosphorus, famous for its jams and desserts that provoked the preeminent Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet to sing its praises. For Jews, the ground of Kuzguncuk is sacred. For over five centuries, its Jewish cemetery on Nakkaştepe has been the resting place of buried pilgrims who once dreamed of Jerusalem.

Nowadays, the local Jewish community has all but vanished. Volkan Özgürçan, director of Mona Art Gallery in İcadiye, said there were only about four old Jewish men left in the neighborhood. Turkish-Jewish journalist Lizi Behmoaras, author of *Jews Through the Eyes of Intellectuals in Turkey*, remembers her days living in Kuzguncuk over a decade ago when she wrote for Şalom,

Turkey's leading Jewish media source, and one of the last newspapers in the world to publish in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish).

"I described Kuzguncuk in my previous novel *Sen Bir Başka Gittin* [You Left in a Particular Way] portraying İcadiye Street with its places of worship, bakeries, art galleries and its square, which lies beneath the shade of a centuries-old plane tree," wrote Behmoaras in a written interview, during which she also shared an excerpt from her first novel, *A Time to Love*, about an Ashkenazi Jewish woman's relationship with a Muslim Turk in Izmir.

Despite its illustrious and historical precedent, Turkish Judaism has only made a slight impression on Kuzguncuk's art district. Famous names, such as the artist Bubi Hayon and author Mario Levi, are relatively aloof from the place that inspired *Kuzguncuk*, a piece of music by Israeli musician Yinon Muallem with the Turkish-Jewish fusion band Rast Ensemble.

"In 1972, when I was exhibiting my paintings in Italy, there was only one art gallery in Istanbul. Now there are 300 to 400," said Habib Gerez, a prominent Turkish-Jewish artist and poet who continued to create in his 80s. From a studio located in Galata, he exhibits and sells paintings, some of which have overt Jewish motifs. "It's not possible to have a Jewish art exhibition in Istanbul. There is no audience. Jews and anyone interested in paintings with Jewish content come to my home gallery," he said.

In 2015, the French-Jewish cartoonist Jeremie Dres published *Les Petits Mondes d'Istanbul*, a graphic literary work edited by Editions Gallimard in the 31st edition of *XXI Ving Et Un Magazine*. Kuzguncuk was the setting for the work that focused on the smattering of Jewish life clinging to the area. The piece features a Jewish widow named Victoria together with Behmoaras and a cheerful old bachelor named Avram, who still scans groceries at Kardeşler Market between İcadiye Ave and Üryanizade St.

"In the 1910s, there were 800 Jewish families here, around 3,200 Jewish people. My family has been in Kuzguncuk for 150 to 180 years. I left Kuzguncuk in 1970. I come here for the Shabbat prayer all of the time," said a natural storyteller on the synagogue board at Beth Yaakov. He sat for a lengthy interview in the synagogue courtyard, detailing his knowledge of the entire history of Kuzguncuk Jewry.

"In the books, it says that this synagogue was built in 1865, but this is wrong. The upcoming year will be the 200th year of Beth Yaakov. Kuzguncuk was one of the first places where the sultan appointed the Sephardim to settle," he explained.

June 9, 11:35 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Aptulika

The basement art gallery and book-lined stairway inside Nail Kitabevi Bookstore and Cafe exhibited a series of literary caricatures, *From Sait Faik to Franz Kafka*, (Sait Faik'ten Kafka'ya in Turkish) by the comic artist Aptulika.

Art lover and publisher Erhan Nailođlu bought the historic building that is now Nail Kitabevi from a barber named Muzaffer and spent over two years restoring its 19th century Baroque and Rococo interiors originally designed by the Balyan Brothers, whose family worked on some 150 buildings in Istanbul, including Dolmabahçe. It is the Flatiron Building of the Bosphorus as its ornate second-story *cumba* bay window hangs over the triangle corner where İcadiye Avenue meets Bereketli Street in the heart of the Anatolian neighborhood of Kuzguncuk.

Sixty-five portraits are on display at *From Sait Faik to Franz Kafka*, the first being that of the "island dweller" and hero of the Turkish short story, Sait Faik to the last, that peerless man of irresistibly unique letters who famously died unsung and in poverty yet celebrated to the extent that the legacy of his works continue to employ countless disciples in his name, Franz Kafka.

The pantheon of international literary icons by Aptulika humorously and sharply follows in the great tradition of caricature, evoking the psychological characteristics of its subjects with clever disproportional emphases.

Orhan Pamuk is straight and narrow, his over-bespectacled face like one big rectangular pencil without an eraser, while Victor Hugo salutes his head off.

Jose Saramago is unraveling from the chest up as Chekhov is tangled down to the ankles by his glasses chain.

Orhan Veli listens with elephant ears as Cesare Pavese sails overseas on his huge floating pipe.

Emre Kongar is vanishing but for the outline of his glasses as Bedri Rahmi Eyübođlu is telling lies with his Pinocchio-sized schnoz.

Can Yücel and Charles Bukowski are drinking buddies.

Michel Foucault is a thought bubble while Oktay Rıfat has tea in an inner-city neighborhood on the Bosphorus.

Ođuz Atay sits on his flying carpet manuscript of *The Disconnected* (in Turkish, *Tutunamayanlar*) as Rıfat Ilgaz walks chained to the book that imprisoned him.

Sherlock Holmes appears in the shadow of Arthur Conan Doyle as Ernest Hemingway is weighed down by hunting gear and an enormous beard.

Stefan Zweig is a ventriloquist while Sait Faik makes a solitary venture to Burgaz Ada.

George Orwell dons a brick coat as Thomas Mann swings from twists of his mustache.

With pieces going for as much as 600 Turkish liras (\$175) a pop, they're hot items on the affordable art market. Drawn over the last few years, the caricatures of Proust and Zweig stand out as the most perceptive and witty, philosophical even, telling the story of each author in a thousand invisible words written in the language of graphic art.

Aptulika is not a stranger to pop culture aesthetics and to the campaign to clarify and visualize and reimagine the great creative yarn of civilization. He typically fuses heavy metal aesthetics with his comics and caricatures, as the signature font of his artist name, Aptulika is an homage to Metallica.

After graduating from Mimar Sinan in 1987, he first drew for *Gırgır* (in English, *Fun*), an illustrated satire rag comparable to *Charlie Hebdo*. Two years later, he formed *Hıbr*, a new graphic magazine with his former colleagues at *Gırgır*, where he led the way as a voice of the slacker generation, renowned for his apathetic characters steeped in the glutted ennui of university life.

While drawing at *Hıbr*, he wrote articles on rock music and heavy metal, most recently culminating in a collaborative effort to illustrate a book with Murat Beşer (titled, in Turkish, *Yoldan Çıkılmış Simililar*, an anthology of alternative Turkish rock. The book is for sale at the Nail Kitabevi Art Gallery along with *Başkomser Nevzat* (in English, *Nevzat, the Chief Inspector*), a graphic novel by the prominent Turkish writer Ahmet Ümit, who is also among the caricatures exhibited at *From Sait Faik to Franz Kafka*.

Lately, Aptulika formed another graphic publication with fellow artists under Cumhuriyet known as *Dinozor*. He is one of a long line of fine artists who have exhibited work in the basement art gallery at Nail Kitabevi, where creative gems from the likes of Feryal Özen, Merve Turan, Mine Çelengil Göker and many others have been on display since the bookstore began its art gallery in March of 2016.

Nail Kitabevi is unplugged, void of house internet. Since opening in June of 2015, patrons and visitors to its cafe, bookstore and art gallery have come for a peace of mind and a strong coffee, for fine art and a good book, and most importantly to focus in on the clear creative visions that furnish its interior, wall-to-wall with inspiration.

July 19, 12:37 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Mona

A short walk from Kuzguncuk pier, through the ascending hall of plane trees up İcadiye Street, the main avenue of the neighborhood, Mona Art is open in more ways than one. It is a gallery of modern and contemporary painters from everywhere. One walks her dog in the neighborhood, another painted with Picasso in Paris.

Its entranceway facade is a modest gray, situated by a *kıraathane*, an old-time cafe for mostly over-the-hill men who wile away the day like news junkies with tea-stained teeth and yellowed tobacco-heavy mustaches. Next door, the eccentric antiques dealer Muhayyer is known for eschewing capitalism altogether, as he gifts historic collectables only to certain guests who accord with his intuitive graces.

Over a hundred years ago, a wealthy Greek family lived across the street from the Church of Hagios Panteleimon. They proudly built the interior of their home with world-renowned Marseille red bricks shipped in directly from France, an architectural signature for many historic Greek buildings in Istanbul from the Patriarchate quarters of the Golden Horn to the mansions of the Prince Islands and up the Bosphorus shorefront.

Nowadays, the century house is inhabited by the gregarious and hospitable Volkan Özgürçan, a former clothier whose wife Aynur first curated paintings as part of her creative architecture business. Her work inspired him with the idea for a gallery, and his daughter Sena was there to fashion the name, Mona, while his son Doğan assists in certain logistical matters, falling back on his education as an industrial engineer. It's a family operation, which the ambiance exudes, full of life and all the playful cheer that is the joy of art appreciation.

Behind the scenes, the artists dig and scour from the depths of the subconscious, from the unseen and unfelt, the mystic unknown and perilous abyss of the world soul for an individual voice in the form of a touch, matter against space, light and form, color and shade, art and essence. Such hapless visionaries as the peerlessly quixotic nonconformist Fatih Uruñ have given Mona Art something to say for itself.

After his untimely passing in 2012 at the age of forty-six, the nearby Syrian-run gallery Kelimat collaborated with Mona on a collective exhibition of Uruñ paintings. One of them still hangs from the wall above the desk where Özgürçan sits to remember him and tell his story to everyone who walks in with the simple curiosity enough to look. It is a volatile oil on canvas of a circular face with rolling white eyes in ruddy browns and blood reds against a vague purplish black background reading: *Weightless on Mars*.

"I couldn't meet him but I have known him," wrote Özgürçan as a dedication to Uruñ in the exhibition publication, where he is praised by friends, colleagues and collectors. "He shouted his life. Fatih, your mother is not the only one who appreciates you. You are precious, famous, well-loved, a great master. Your art fascinates."

One of the most striking pieces on display at Mona Art is an authentically signed Salvador Dali print of his etching for *Apparition of My Cousin Carolinetta on the Beach At Rosas*, which Özgürçan is quick to point out with blissful pride. Its presence catapults any presumption of Mona Art as a locals-only neighborhood joint into an establishment of world-class taste, something that is especially precious and esteemed in Istanbul, particularly in the arts scene.

His curation is heavily influenced by the international movement known as Naive art, advocating for the work of artists whose sources of inspiration and technical methods are void of formal training, independent of the arts education establishment. In that way, he exhibits modernist greats like Robert College dropout Abidin Dino, who led Group D and the Group of New Artists in early to mid-20th century Turkey.

Dino held shows across the globe, organizing the 1939 Turkish section of the New York Exposition. In Paris, he befriended Picasso and Gertrude Stein, falling in love with the city enough to make it his home until death. His *Hands* sculpture in Maçka Democracy Park, made in 1993, has immortalized his name in his birthplace of Istanbul.

Along the wall beside a couple nebulous black-and-white drawings of Dino are the works of a fitting companion, Adnan Turani, who passed away last year, leaving behind a numerously awarded reputation befitting a national icon. His cubist impressionism is startlingly emotive in its originality, and Özgürçan has some of his most captivating work on display.

Under the doorway mantle where passersby often stop by blinking with fascination at the surprisingly personable and uplifting curation at Mona Art, the meticulously expert paintings of Bayram Gümüş hang delicately awaiting the right collector. Gümüş is a living contemporary and chief proponent of the Naive movement among Turkish artists. His landscapes, like *Peysage* (2004) and *Shipyards* (2009) employ masterful pointillist technique and architecturally geometric precision.

Yusuf Katipoğlu and Mine Göker are Kuzguncuk locals. Since 1980, Katipoğlu has lived in Kuzguncuk out of his workshop, where he's mixed his phosphorescent colors to illuminate his visionary, daydream forms as a neighborhood lion with six exhibitions at Kuzguncuk's own Harmony Art Gallery while showing in Switzerland, Germany, Macedonia, and Istanbul's International Art Fairs four consecutive years in a row.

And then there are the flavorful candy-striped palettes of Mine Göker, whose cartoonish cityscapes are irresistibly fun as she details the quotidian charm of Istanbul one precious moment at a time. She also contributes to the artful neighborhood air of Kuzguncuk, including a May exhibition at Nail Kitabevi.

The word for curation comes from the same Latin root for “to cure”. The curator has a remedy for the artist, and for the public. For the artist, it is space, and an outlet of appreciation. For the

public, it is that window to a meaningful experience of the inner life of humanity. In many ways, the curator is as imaginative as an artist, being the medium between obscurity and fame.

When Fatih Urunç passed away, a star fell beneath the horizon and all who remembered his brilliance knew that his art would never fade. As the constellations form with the blazing mystery of the universe, new stars become apparent, while first very faintly, rising only within sight of those few who are truly looking.

It was one fateful day when Özgürcan received word from a collector that the light of a new star could be seen on the horizon of the contemporary arts world. The collector called from Bursa with the news that he found just what Özgürcan was looking for in a new feature artist.

His name is Taner Yılmaz, a promising upstart among emerging painters on the international contemporary scene. The Brick Lane Gallery in London acquired his work for its "Contemporary Painting" exhibition in January.

Yılmaz is a young master of portraiture. His subjects are mostly women. Özgürcan testifies that the faces are drawn solely from his imagination. His art demonstrates a surgical knife-edge skill, as he is known to form facial lines more quickly than a craftsman well beyond his years. And yet, the sheer originality of his abstract expressionism is refreshing, considering the fact that he is an artist of the unschooled Naive movement.

Last week, Özgürcan acquired four more of his paintings, and is preparing an exhibit of his work at Mona Art Gallery in November. The paintings of Yılmaz surge loudly with uninhibited emotional texture, as they multiply and take flight, signed in charcoal and stardust.

July 27, 7:44 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Linden

Modern life is made up of tiny fragments of time: secondary videos, hourly meetings, daily assignments, weekly forecasts, monthly bills, yearly vacations. The experience of time is relative to the frequency of its measurement.

Floods can be described as time lapses, mythic and beyond the scope of human direction. They have the power to remind people of the natural clock that once measured human communities in the building blocks of existence: births, puberties, marriages, children, and deaths.

Along with the related self-destructive tendencies of the earth, floods recalibrate and disrupt human lives and cities with abrupt transformations that, while seemingly untimely and at worse tragic, are as natural as the air.

More importantly, floods reconnect people to the pace of prehistory. When the earth floods, time seems to rush as fast as the onslaught of water, emphasizing the special relationship between the prevailing human infrastructures, be they farms or cities, and the local waterscape.

The one and hundred and ten millimeters of rain that fell on Istanbul and Ihlamurdere Avenue in Beşiktaş district through the afternoon of July 18, 2017 signaled an organic interval of thirty-two years, drenching the city in volumes of rainfall unseen since 1985.

Nine days later, half of the local July rainfall average fell from the sky, punctuated with crystal-form, jagged nine centimeter-wide hailstones that tore at the noses of planes gripped with emergency landings. Countless roofs and windows were riddled with dents and fractures.

Ihlamurdere Avenue marks a path where nature and the city merge into a unique, and arguably distinctly, Turkish manifestation of the urban ecology. Once flowing into the Bosphorus by the recently restored Naval Museum facing Barbarossa Square and Beşiktaş pier, it is said that an ancient riverbed lies beneath the pavement in the Ihlamur Valley between Yıldız Hill and the neighborhood highlands of Nişantaşı and Teşvikiye neighborhoods.

Its streams descended steeply over the graffitied sidewalk stairwells of Topağacı quarter from the lavish precinct of Şişli district, where the contemporary palace is an apartment suite in the city's most expensive real estate market

Vestiges of the inner-city waterscape ecology are underground in Beşiktaş, paved over by Muradiye Deresi and Fulya Deresi Streets, both named after the Turkish word for stream: *dere*. They intersect at the rotary where Ihlamurdere Avenue begins, running through World Peace and Azerbaijan Friendship Parks, once all part of the Ihlamur Kasrı palace grounds, into what is now one of the busiest nightlife and cafe districts in Istanbul.

Ihlamurdere Avenue is equally named for its stream of linden trees. (*ihlamur* means linden in Turkish.) Linden trees live as long as a millennium, just like the plane trees that grow alongside them on Ihlamurdere, shading the many caffeinated pedestrians cooled by a walk on the shady avenue. The linden trees that grow in Turkey are only two of thirty varieties. They are known to naturalists as *Tilia platyphyllos*, commonly large-leaved linden and *Tilia tomentosa*, the silver linden, both of which are cultivated at Ihlamur Kasrı (in English, *kasrı* means pavilion).

In the mid-19th century, linden trees were fast becoming central to Ottoman Turkish culture under the famous sympathizer to European style, Abdülmecit I. At the time, the Turks were invading Slovenia, a Balkan nation known to venerate linden trees as part of its folklore. In fact, many trees in Slovenia still bear the name "Turkish linden," as locals swear they stand where Turks were defeated.

The Sultan had plans for Ihlamur Valley. He remembered the vale from his boyhood as the Hacı Hüseyin Vineyards, with its rustic, wooden hunting lodge. He commissioned the renowned Balyan family of Armenian architects to replace the lodge with Ihlamur Kasrı after they had completed work on Dolmabahçe Palace, and to link the newly Europeanized Ottoman sphere of influence with a three-kilometer coach road.

It was all part of his plan to urbanize Constantinople westward as the city population doubled in the 1800s to nearly a million by the turn of the century. In the process, he moved the entire cultural and political nexus of the Ottoman dynasty, literally, from old Istanbul centered in Topkapı Palace, to Beşiktaş.

Ihlamur Valley became a gateway to the European wilderness beyond the hunting grounds of its new palace. The imperial works were designed by Nigoğos Balyan as an opulent pair of pavilions in French Baroque, Rococo and Orientalist styles, surrounded by elegant gardens that echoed into the present with a world-class arboretum and strutting peacocks.

The French poet and statesman Lamartine was one of the many distinguished guests at the Ihlamur Pavilions. He had the special privilege of seeing the countryside and its civil infrastructure transform. In 1850, he described its first structure as a cottage fit for an impoverished priest, nothing resembling a palace.

In five years, the pavilions opened and the Sultan and his many esteemed guests were off practicing archery at rich picnics furnished for Balkan leaders who watched as silver-collared mastiffs and greyhounds caught wild rabbits. Returning to repose at the Linden Tree Mansion, guests drank the palace-favorite linden tea aplenty before soaking in medicinal, fragrant baths full of the sedative linden blossoms that continue to burst around the palace seasonally, peaking from June to July.

"If one had but a single glance to give the world, one should gaze on Istanbul," wrote Lamartine, one of his most classic turns of phrase that evokes the proud agrarian heritage of the late

Ottoman capital, which he compared to the illustrious Bay of Naples, a comparable pearl in the eye of many great European artists.

In old photographs of Ihlamur Kasrı, the white ceremonial pavilion contrasts brightly against a landscape of forests and hills, and a winding road that disappears into a grove of lindens. The source of the Ihlamurdere stream once flowed past Linden Palace from the slopes of Nişantaşı as Muradiye Stream, and from Yıldız Hill as Fulya Stream, forming its headwaters by the palace gate.

Now, beyond the overburdened urban crowds in Beşiktaş, there are still waterscapes in greater Istanbul that mirror the bygone wetland, arboreal ecology of Ihlamurdere. One such stream is Kurbağalıdere in Kadıköy, on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, which inspired the 20th-century Turkish artist Hikmet Onat.

Far inland beyond the European Bosphorus, yet within the metropolitan region of Istanbul, the waters of Kağıthane have the distinction of an ecological continuity with Ottoman times. While not exactly still frequented by fez-wearing oarsmen, the urban waterscape is intact, reminiscent of the bygone wetland map of pre-modern Constantinople, or indigenous Mexico City, as a more contemporary example of its ancient predecessor Tenochtitlan, partly preserved by the touristic Venice-like canals of Xochimilco.

One of the most lucid depictions of the waterscapes of old Constantinople is dated to 1838. It is an engraving signed by P. Lightfoot after a drawing by Thomas Allom, titled, *The Barbyses, or Sweet Waters of Europe*. It shows a forest-covered minaret downstream from picnic parties in the foreground filled with merriment. Women twirl each other to the music of fellow female percussionists, and everyone is adorned in multicolored, frilly dresses over a green and liquid utopia of tree-lined, architecturally glorified shorefronts.

Such romantic depictions merit basic skepticism over sheer captivation, yet if the fact that countless streets in Istanbul are named after streams is any indication of its pre-modern waterscapes, then the city was truly rich with a fluid heritage that went well inland, flowing alongside lindens and groves of all kinds, where people sailed, feasted, romped, hunted and, at times, drowned in its everlasting and irrepressible nature.

July 31, 10:41 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Pages

Over the bygone wooden planks of Galata Bridge, where the Ottoman subjects of Constantinople walked through time to become the Turkish citizens of Istanbul, the Golden Horn inlet below is an incandescent confluence of the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus strait. Along its obstructed though passable concrete boardwalk, the smoke of grilled fish wafts from the painfully constructed shoreline of splintering, derelict boats that seem moored for eternity.

Then, a stunning maroon beacon of vinous French-imported brick angles upward into the sky like the proud flag of its ancient local Greek community. It is the Fener Greek Orthodox School, often mistaken for the Patriarchate where the head of the Greek Orthodox Church prays to Gregorian chants as first among equals. The Byzantine ambiance of the long lost holy city echoes beneath manifold icons and dusty lamps, untold sanctuaries and unburied saints.

Under the shadow of the school, built like a masonic castle by 19th century architect Konstantinos Dimadis, the neighborhood storefronts are overrun with the familiar gentrification hustle of vintage clothing shops and third-generation espresso blenders. While controversial, the narrow, colorful streets of Fener weave a tapestry of urban revitalization.

Fener follows in step with a hard and fast principle that has developed in recent decades in global cities everywhere. First, artists and visionaries of all kinds navigate the hardest roads of conservatism and neglect, as they clear the way for cultural and historical appreciation with a mind for contemporary and future trends. With time, the cash registers of globalization follow, ringing with entrepreneurial investment and real estate value. The mixed ethnicities, faiths and classes of Fener and neighboring Balat are in the nascent, early stage of another boom as local creative potential is practically breathable.

Gentrification, in certain contexts, can be read as another word for modernization, and it is most dramatically defined by the secular-to-religious split as seen in the Golden Horn neighborhoods of Istanbul and in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, for example. The most religious neighborhood in Istanbul is called Çarşamba, a short walk uphill from Fener. Its communities proudly wear the *cübbe* robe and *takke* caps.

Like the tailors and scribes who file out from the tenements of the Orthodox Jews in Williamsburg, there is a stark contrast between the religious families in Çarşamba and the people who promote expressive individualism and public openness in the cafes and galleries of Fener.

As a kindred soul of the East River in New York, the Golden Horn inlet of Istanbul runs as deep. In the spiritual heartland of Greek Orthodoxy, source of all directions for some twenty-four million people in prayer, is Balat, which also happens to be one of the oldest Jewish neighborhood in Istanbul. Its streets are lively with caffeine-addled jet-setters who walk unaware past three distinct synagogues whose foundations have weathered two empires and a modern

state. They stand with Balkan names derived from the homelands of the communities who founded them.

Down the street from the earliest extant synagogue in Istanbul, known by the Macedonian place name of its builders' origins, *Ahrida*, there is another synagogue, uniquely exposed from behind without a stone wall to protect its ramshackle wooden exterior. It was established by the Jews of Istipol, also from what is now North Macedonia. Across from its overgrown, abandoned Hebrew-engraved stone gate, an Albanian-designed cobblestone roadway ascends steeply toward the highest of the seven hills in old Constantinople, to the neighborhood of Edirnekapi.

Around the corner from immaculately preserved eight hundred-year-old Byzantine mosaics and frescos in the museum of Chora Church is Pages Bookstore, a contemporary Syrian-led cultural landmark of world literature that lives and breathes with contemporary art. Its owner and curator, Samer al-Kadri is an internationally exhibiting impressionist himself. He is known to step down the creaking stairs of his three-story bookstore cafe to greet guests with a welcoming smile.

Turks, Syrians and people from across the planet come to Pages to borrow and buy the books that line its shelves, as they peruse its spectacular diversity of literature albeit geared to a mostly Arabic readership. Translations of Amin Maalouf are stacked beside the latest editions of *Bright Fingers*, the publishing house of children's books by Samer al-Kadri and Gulnar Hajo, who participated in the 8th Istanbul Tanpınar Literature Festival in Istanbul.

The cafe has become a perennial rendezvous for Syrian artists, writers and musicians who meet every Saturday night for live concerts featuring instrumentation from Istanbul to Aleppo and diasporas beyond.

One flight up in the restored classic-style wooden home of old Istanbul, there is a verdant garden behind the cafe serving sweet Syrian coffee. Sometimes spending as much as eleven hours a day, seven days a week enlightening the community space, Kadri is comfortable sharing his perspective on everything from revolution to literature to art and parenting.

During one impromptu conversation with a visitor from Ankara, he lamented how Syria had been bombed by seventy countries. And yet, for him, he expressed unwavering confidence in revolution. That day, he gifted a young Turkish-American couple the definitive Penguin English translation of *The Time Regulation Institute* by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar.

Before they left, he invited them to see one of his latest paintings in his third-floor studio at Pages, which he was then preparing for an exhibition in Europe. It was an awe-inspiring impression of crimson that swam with the form of a mermaid-like figure, recalling the tragedies experienced by Syrian refugees in the Aegean Sea. Even in dim lighting, the color and character of his work appeared to burst into brilliant flashes from the evening studio where he had worked nights after hosting workshops, readings, concerts and classes well-attended by local Syrians.

Calligrapher Ahmet Delli is currently exhibiting two of his works on the second-floor gallery walls at Pages. He frequents the cafe almost every day as one of many cultural fixtures from the growing community-in-exile who have found a second home in Istanbul. His paintings are light on the eye. They are simple touches of ink and shadow, influenced by the Turkish marbled paper art known as *ebru* as well as illuminated Islamic manuscripts. He reimagines the abstract conceptualism of written language under a fine brush. His shapes appear as carefully formed as the enunciation of the sacred, unwritten vowels of the Arabic tongue.

Between the many formal exhibition shows is the grace of the communal interior of Pages, featuring such painters as Houssam Alloum, Ahmad Aldulli, and Saif Al-Taie. The current artworks on display faithfully reinforce the permanent in-house aesthetic of social transformation through such creative movements as postmodernism and neorealism.

The latest examples are two dyed mosaics by an anonymous artist signed Kafranbel after the village in Syria that became world-famous for leading the revolution through satirical cartoons and independent media. Since antiquity, Kafranbel has had a global reputation for fine mosaics. Its artistic heritage is revitalized in part because of two framed contemporary mosaics over the cafe tables at Pages, one of a mythic celebration of prophetic optimism, as the other evokes the nightmarish dystopia of an imprisoned mother with child.

It is over the sliver of each newly printed leaf where self-education is found and social empowerment earned. It is on a leaf of paper where calligraphers express the silent beauty of visual language. Most importantly, from the leaves of a book in Pages, minds are made and they are changed. And after turning over a new leaf, they will look up and see art.

August 8, 10:11 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Gallery-in-Exile

During the hottest days of the summer, the heat in Istanbul is brutal, intensified by the magnified glare of storefronts exposed to the sun. Shining in the sunlight throughout the summer, two display windows beside the entrance to Kelimat Gallery offer exhibits of contemporary art, impressing even to the most jaded of urbanites.

Throughout every season for the past year, Kelimat Gallery has presented visionary worlds that seek to deepen the emotional range of human expression well beyond the institutional formulas of recognition. Its art is curated to represent the unschooled movement of Brut Art, initially an idea born in France whose patron saint is iconoclastic outsider artist Jean Dubuffet.

Around the corner from İcadiye Avenue in Kuzguncuk, the least-kept but best secret among all Bosphorus neighborhoods in the largely conservative Anatolian district of Üsküdar, is the owner and curator of Kelimat Gallery. A sturdy, middle-aged Syrian man named Adnan Alahmad wears a hard grin with an approachable candor as he sways about his gallery in the manner of quiet intellectual satisfaction, calmly harboring his love for art acquisition while savoring every display of originality from the specially gifted, featuring often unfairly obscure Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi artists in his collection.

Situated on Bostan Street, his gallery neighbors moveable feasts on Wednesdays, as its open-air market becomes crowded with farm-fresh goods for wholesalers, restaurants and foodies alike. The air evokes the romance of village life, reinforcing the quintessential Kuzguncuk ambiance that makes it a diamond in the rough of Istanbul.

In a breath, Alahmad invokes the name, Jean Dubuffet. To his artistic lineage, among them prisoners, psychotics, children, primitives and graffitists, Alahmad adds the traumatized victims of war, so many of whom have fled his country in the millions. He curates a rare and challenging breed of artists, many of whose paintings have been visibly influenced by Dubuffet, with his naive, post-impressionist studies of archaic, elementary and abandoned forms that blur the line between consciousness and the subliminal.

Ibrahim al-Hassoun, one of three house artists at Kelimat Gallery, took immediately to the technical sophistication and philosophical resonance of Dubuffet. His February exhibition drew audiences close to the tangled, spindly edges of his signature style. He paints bodies of landscapes that evade quick perception, animating the feeling of disbelief with a limited palette, as his forms emerge like mutants out of baths of eerie mists showering blood, fire and rust.

Hassoun spent two years in the dark, secluded from the art world. When he finally stepped into the light, his first show was at Kelimat, where his most recent work is on display. Rather than ruminating on the tragedy of war in his homeland, which was derailing enough to compel him to temporarily stop painting, his art celebrates life by taking a traumatic experience and reshaping it in color and in the memory of a new creative act.

“In his canvases, the diverse forms of the human body form the setting of the artwork,” wrote Dr. Nizar Saboor, professor of fine arts at Damascus University, echoing the visual impressions created by Hassoun in black-and-white ink on paper.

“Ibrahim al-Hassoun is separated from his homeland but his works are still faithful in capturing Syrian art, and its 'Levantine realism,’” he explained.

At any time of day, Alahmad is bright and conversational. If he is absent, his right-hand man, Hüseyin Emiroğlu, presents himself, inviting as a local friend from the neighborhood. They run an open house, offering guests a generous opportunity to explore many house publications that fill in the details about the lives and works of the artists of their current exhibit, sometimes even offering visitors a chance to meet them.

The work of Trabzon-born artist Salih Turan, who stamped his illustrious early career with the mark of Art Brut when he resigned from his academic post in 1986 to create free from the trappings of nepotistic institutionalization and insider drama, was the first to exhibit at Kelimat. His art evokes the emotional strength of a beggar standing at the exit in the prison of civilization. He is a fugitive from history, escaping formalism one brushstroke at a time.

Among the canvases of mostly Arab artists stacked and shelved in the back hall collections of the modest, spare gallery space at Kelimat, lie the works by Syrian poet Adonis. Alahmad has two of Adonis's manuscript-based collages on paper, which frame his Arabic script to a mixed media play on the literary forms he has used to make a name for himself.

Meriting a special solo exhibition publication at Kelimat is the artwork of Sema Maşkılı. Originally from Edirne and university-trained, her pieces have that eccentric quality that only an outsider could evoke. Nilgün Yüksel, a young art historian from Istanbul, wrote the foreword in the Maşkılı book published by Kelimat. She compares the themes in Maşkılı's paintings to the Biblical story of the flood, the passion of Noah and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by famed, medieval Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch.

Maşkılı is truly an heir to the pantheon of greats who continually guide the spiritual direction of contemporary art. In her primary medium, oil on canvas, she brings out the paint to reflect an abstract realism that is uncanny in its simplicity while dogged in its symbolism of the evolution and devolution of humanity. She grapples with the physical qualms of age and sex with literal cannibalistic intensity as she wrestles with the psychological complexities of humility and courage in portraits that transform imperfection into inspired, textural coloring.

Soon after the untimely death of Fatih Urunç in 2012, friends remembered him as a man who lived for art until his final days, as his prolific work shows incomparable genius. In response, Kelimat Gallery collaborated with Mona Art, another local curator and collector in Kuzguncuk, to hold a group exhibition of his paintings. Arguably, he left behind a legacy for Turkish art that

might, in a parallel dimension, be compared to that of Jean-Michel Basquiat in America. He is a spirit brother to Sun Ra from the silent world of color.

As in his painting, he had childlike fixations, including an affinity for the planet Mars, couched in his satirical, completely Art Brut worldview. One of his best oil on canvas paintings conveys a rough-and-tumble pastel and crayon, like a kindergarten workshop gone awry, with a druggie-eyed, orange, anthropomorphic alien-animal inside a space craft in the shape of a drinking glass.

Then, showing at Kelimat is the hallucinogenic, recurring dreamscapes of Özkan Gencer, who paints in a mystic image-language of plaid elephants and airborne romances, unopened letters and rectangular abstraction. His art has an effervescent, floating beauty with a voice as gentle as his own; Gencer is a kind, and easygoing social artist. He attends his openings and explains his work patiently. His solo exhibition at Kelimat ends in one week as the gallery prepares to curate from its house collection of mostly unknown, yet profoundly talented Arab artists.

About once every month, Alahmad and his son Karam entertain guests in fluent Turkish, Arabic and English as they host new exhibitions with a taste for Art Brut. Further, the entire Alahmad family is known to pair openings with a traditional Syrian feast. Alahmad himself proudly hands out his homemade falafel, as he invites everyone from the street to come together over whipped hummus, oregano-caked pita and sugary sweet cookies.

August 2, 10:20 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Workshop

From the New Gate to Jaffa Gate, the 16th century Ottoman-era fortress walls of the Old City of Jerusalem gleam with the pearly exaltation of unshakable and seemingly interminable renown in this world, and for believers, into the next. Since the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, pilgrims to the Cave of the Patriarchs, now in modern-day Al-Khalil (Hebron in Hebrew), have stumbled over palm-reading beggars while tolerating the crusading preachers once crowding Jaffa Gate.

By 1889, the Christian Quarter had its own special outlet beyond the imperial walls where it increasingly expanded after the opening of the New Gate.

The four historic quarters of the Old City in Jerusalem preserve the colorfully distinct heritages of Armenians, Jews, Muslims and Christians, as they welcome newcomers from as far as Afghanistan and India. The ivory stone walls of the polished rock-hewn streets gravitate with the global prestige that has fixed the city as the mythopoeic center of the world for untold cultural and spiritual expressions.

In the Christian Quarter, beside the busy market avenues, local districts are silent inside the Old City walls, harboring an otherworldly peace as profound as the whole planetary foundation, setting the city and its people in a terminal relationship with each other, wedded for history.

Around the corner from the Latin Patriarchate, where Catholics returned to Jerusalem under the flag of the Vatican in 1847 after over five hundred years of banishment, the artisan tile factory of the Palestinian Kassisieh family lightens the solemn religious ambiance with a postmodern engraving: "Jerusalem is the Fame, Peace is the Aim".

Established in 1900, the factory was known as The Workshop (Al Ma'mal in Arabic), illuminating Palestinian homes throughout Jerusalem and the region into the 1940s. Al Ma'mal kept its name as it became the Foundation for Contemporary Art, essentially serving as the nucleus for the latest Palestinian art revival in East Jerusalem. Beside the Kassisieh factory relief, the only sign for Al Ma'mal is a goat, symbolizing headstrong endurance, over the glass doors.

Inside are remnants of its tile-making past, now maintaining the antique aesthetic of Palestinian cultural heritage transformed from its skilled craftsmen to its abstract painters.

The heir to the tile factory building is Issa Khalil, an Al Ma'mal board member and Palestinian ambassador to the Holy See. He witnessed the radical transformation that has come to define his family legacy. While helping his grandfather before school at the workshop in the 1970s, he saw it close following military occupation and regulatory interference by the Israeli government, effectively destroying traditional industries and family-owned local businesses in the Old City.

In 1992, Armenian-Palestinian curator Jack Persekian opened Anadiel, the first Palestinian art gallery on Salah Eddin Street near the New Gate. During its brief four-year run, Persekian

foresaw more potential in the abandoned Kassisieh tile factory. He established Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in 1998 as a nonprofit organization. While there has been a recent wave of commercial art galleries selling Palestinian art in the Old City, Al Ma'mal is foremost purposed to recognize and support Palestinian artists who will connect with undeserved communities in East Jerusalem.

The paintings of Ramallah-based Mohamed S. Khalil were on display until the last week of August for his solo show titled, *The Mundane*. Born in Jordan in 1960 and educated in Dresden and Damascus, his impressionistic abstractions draw from his 1994 return to Palestine, his homeland, where he has since developed a prestigious series of international exhibitions while working for the Palestinian Ministry of Culture.

It is said that he only paints on the side, and in that sense his work embodies the soul of the Naive and Art Brut movements. In his oversaturated color schemes and recurrent noetic symbolism, there are shared affinities with Turkish artists Fatih Urunç and Özkan Gencer.

Upcoming artist Ines Halabi lives and works in Jerusalem as a practitioner of mixed-media, research-based artworks that fall within the genres of visual media, installation and video. Preparing for her show at Al Ma'mal, in late September, Halabi spent a year over obscure photographic archives in Basel, Switzerland after earning a residency nomination, granted by support from Al Ma'mal. She took ample time to let her creative juices flow while appreciating the bankrolled, punctual chocolatiers famous to the Swiss lifestyle. She saw her muse in the photographs of two cousins who documented themselves collecting artifacts in Southeast Asia. Her work highlights the subtext of colonial history in the images in a series of photo interventions and manipulated visuals that highlight cultural appropriation.

In March, the founder of Al Ma'mal, Jack Persekian co-curated a fellow Armenian-Palestinian, artist Benji Boyadgian, whose site-specific installation integrated the art of tile-making with contemporary sculpture. Exhibiting his art required changes to the building, including a new ceiling window, and glass flooring for his piece that extended from the foundation to the roof.

While prepping the space for the exhibition, archaeologists excavated a well from the Islamic period, over a thousand years old, and a wall that could be part of the earlier Old City from the time of Saladin.

In honor of the creative heritage of the Kassisieh family, Al Ma'mal is employing every last aspect of the building. Its rooftop doubles as a cafe and concert stage, with startlingly beautiful panoramas of the Old City. At the basement level, the bygone ceramic dust of the old tile manufacturing feels like it has yet to completely settle. Nowadays, there is a video projection screen for film nights. It is often left down for frequent use behind an upright piano and sound equipment ready for live music, such as the Palestinian rock band El Container, or Dina Shilleh, who released her album, *Sudfa*, at Al Ma'mal on Aug. 25.



Al Ma'mal is just one of three pioneering Palestinian arts institutions in Jerusalem's Old City. Together with Al Hoash (The Courtyard, in Arabic), and Yabous Cultural Center, Al Ma'mal has organized a cultural network called Shafaq to raise funds collectively while developing activities. The network inaugurated its first program in October with a night festival to vitalize the Old City after dark, much in the spirit of daytime Jerusalem Show when Al Ma'mal exhibits a number of site-specific pieces from West to East Jerusalem.

The main focus of the night festival is on Al Zahra Street and its surrounding neighborhood with such cultural hotspots as Al Quds Cinema, Edward Said National Conservatory of Music and El-Hakawati (Palestinian National) Theatre.

“East Jerusalem has sort of lost all cultural activity. Our audiences are limited to middle-class, open-minded families and we want to reach out to the general public,” said Aline Houry, programming director at Al Ma'mal.

“West Jerusalem is active at night. In East Jerusalem, as soon as the sun sets it's a ghost town. We're doing a Jerusalem nights festival to activate specific neighborhoods,” she said.

When Al Ma'mal celebrated its twenty year anniversary, they hosted London-based writer Nicola Gray at their in-house residency on the gallery floor with the intention of publishing a retrospective art book. Since 1998, the Foundation broadened the cultural landscape from the New Gate to Jaffa Gate, and from Anadiel to Al Ma'mal contemporary Palestinians are creating themselves anew, remaking the Old City inspired to create a future more glorious than its past.

August 17, 11:18 PM  
Jerusalem

## Ottoman-American

The fez made its appearance in New York to the gurgling sound of the water pipe and the raspy throats of crooners whose voices rose and fell over accompanists on instruments as exotic to America as the languages they spoke.

Until the Great Depression began in 1929, major record companies like Columbia, Victor and Edison recorded waves of immigrant music in New York, as the Old World moved across the Atlantic Ocean from the territories of the Ottoman Empire to make an extraordinary, while still obscure mark on American music history.

Since the 2011 release of his compilation *To What Strange Place: Music of the Ottoman-American Diaspora 1916-1929* with Tompkins Square Records, music historian and sound restorationist Ian Nagoski has produced a number of albums that reflect the diverse rhythms and modes, songs and improvisations of Ottoman migrants in New York. His label, Canary Records, is a goldmine, purveying at least fourteen compilations of early modern songs in Turkish, Armenian, Greek, Kurdish, Arabic and Ladino that voice the Ottoman migrant struggle to resettle in America. Its music powerfully reimagines the meaning of land, sea and home.

One hundred years ago, in April of 1917, the singer Zabelle Panosian felt mixed emotions walking through Little Syria by City Hall in Manhattan. She entered the intimidating Woolworth Building skyscraper to record at Columbia, which had already pressed eighty of her performances. In her exquisite, operatic voice she swooned with seasonal nostalgia for her birthplace of modern-day Bahçecik, singing *Caroun* (Spring) for as many as seven takes, a supreme luxury for immigrant singers in her day.

Among the seven songs that Panosian recorded that April were *Tzain Dour Ov Dzovag* (Call to the Sea) and her masterpiece, *Gruong* (Crane), a best-seller for the over a hundred thousand Armenian migrants who had migrated from the Ottoman Empire. The month she made that timeless record, the Turks sided with Germany in World War I and the delicate threads of U.S.-Ottoman relations were severed. Panosian sang *Gruong* for her fellow exiles: "Crane, have you not news from our country? / Hasten not to your flock, you will arrive soon enough!"

Ottoman singers and instrumentalists in New York performed the sounds of the migrant ecology that defined them, and which they overcame, as recurrent themes in the songs they wrote and played to evoke Anatolian plains, the Greek peninsula, Armenian highlands and Arab deserts.

New York transformed Ottoman music into a genre justly termed Old Wave, as its historical appreciation deepens as it emerges anew. The independent ethnic record companies in early twentieth century New York had foresight enough to amplify that sound when it was still green. Among countless labels were Pharos, M.G. Parsekian, A.J. Macksoud, Sohag, Panhellenic, Orthophonic, Stamboul and Oriental, which offered spaces for Armenian, Greek, Arab, Kurdish

and Turkish alike to express common Ottoman migrant experiences through sounds that merged boundaries with a passion to match the imperial geography of the sultan.

In 1915, the father and son violinist-piano duo Stephan and Haigaz Simonian left Kayseri in the wake of deportations to board a ship from Greece to Ellis Island. Once in America, they recorded the Greek celebration tune *Hop Pala* (a derivation of *opa!*) with the Armenian-owned Pharos Records. The company's name is a word common to Armenian, Greek and Turkish, meaning "lighthouse" as it led storm-tossed and seasick migrants to disembark in New York where they added creative fuel to its guiding, musical fire.

Housed at the watch repair shop of the Vartesian Brothers in Little Armenia, currently Kips Bay in East Midtown between the Flatiron and Gramercy districts, the Pharos label eventually bought out M.G. Parsekian in the mid-1920s, preserving his catalogue in print until the Depression hit. Much of the Ottoman music that was recorded in New York is clouded in enigmatic anonymity to contemporaries, as Orientalist subjects were for pre-modern Westerners.

As is traditional to Ottoman citizens, Kemany Minas, for example, has no surname. He simply bears the Turkish honorific for master violinist, "kemany," followed by a common Armenian name that is derived from the Greek. While there is no extant biographical information about him, the thirty recordings he made from 1916-1917 in Manhattan pioneered a fusion of styles that merged Turkish classical and folk musics with original composition, ultimately inspiring the heart of the Old Wave movement along 8th Avenue.

One of his best known pieces, *Bülbül Canto* (Nightingale ballad), is set to an old Turkish song, *Ah Şu Dağlar* (On These Mountains).

Even though he had immigrated to the United States at the age of ten in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Karekin Proodian never left his folk music roots behind. And they remain strong on the Black Sea coast of Turkey in his native Samsun. He was the first to record with M.G. Parsekian when he founded his label in New Jersey around 1920. Among the twenty pieces that Parsekian released with Proodian was the song *Chinary Yares Aghchg*, a lyrical metaphor comparing an eastern Armenian girl to a poplar tree.

The multicultural blend of Ottoman music is apparent in the individual, as migrant artists wore many hats. Nishan Sedefjian grew up in Trabzon speaking the north Anatolian minority language of Laz and thought of himself as Pontian Greek. In Little Armenia, he was a jeweler and violinist who recorded improvisations with Pharos, as he resided across the street.

He often accompanied the talented Greek singer and *oud* player Achilleas Poulos who ran a cafe with his wife on 8th Avenue illegally selling wine and drinking hard during Prohibition. From 1916 to 1927 he recorded over a hundred performances, mainly with small Armenian companies though he made two unissued pieces for Victor.

Born in Constantinople at the turn of the century, the prolific Greek composer Tetos Demetriades peerlessly abridged the great distances, physically and culturally, between American and Ottoman cultures through music. He arguably gave surf rock its most enduring melody with *Miserlou*, and during the Depression when immigrant labels closed, he continually filled the creative gap between Greece, Turkey and the United States by importing new music so that artists could develop a living, contemporary sound tradition. As a producer in the 1940s, he knew no bounds recording everyone from Athens to Harlem and beyond.

Migrant music is initially defined by endurance and perseverance through separation and loss. It is then resolved in the harmonization of identity and individuality with communal expression in strange lands, alongside new people. While far from a utopia, the multinational culture of the Ottoman Empire lived on in diaspora to enrich America as a kindred, older soul. It's still audible in cryptic lyrics revived from the scratchy records of the Old Wave sound.

September 9, 6:50 PM  
New York City, USA

## Metropolitan

Early in 1868, the artist Jean-Leon Gerome returned to Paris with silk tunics and a military headdress that he had acquired during his twelve weeks in the Near East. In his studio located in Rue de Bruxelles, which stood atop his opulent house, stables and sculpture room, he fitted two models in the exotic clothing and went to work on a couple of oil paintings that he titled, *Bashi-Bazouk*, which is a colloquialism for crazy in Turkish, literally “head-broken”, and short for "volunteering soldiers who were not registered in the regular army," named after a class of Ottoman mercenaries who were compensated solely in the spoils of war.

Later that year, his worldwide fame preceded him as he was invited to the opening of the Suez Canal in Cairo with the most important French artists of the day. In modern terms, the Orientalist, whether contemporary or antiquated, typically depicts Turkey, Greece, the Middle East and North Africa. Considering that these areas are also former territories of the Ottoman Empire, it could be argued that Orientalist thought essentially illustrates the complexities of the European relationship with Ottoman lands, as depicted in painting, literature and even politics.

While Orientalist motifs in art history can be observed as far back as the Renaissance and Baroque eras, the years of French occupation in Egypt from 1798 to 1801 sparked unprecedented interest eastward among European elites privy to world affairs. The Orientalist art of Gerome depicts the contrast between realism with romanticism, as his photographic paintings evoke bygone sociologies and extinct cultures that appear like a fantasy to the contemporary eye. *Bashi-Bazouk* is an example of aesthetic purity, as its heavily adorned models appear beautiful and picturesque, in Ottoman garb and entirely removed from the painful reality of unpaid soldiers who lived for blood money.

For Gerome and his fellow Orientalist painters, the word "Easterner" meant "outsider." With his paintbrush, he sought to give a voice to the black sheep of Europe by traveling to Constantinople for the first time in 1853 after selling his canvas, *Age of Augustus* to the court of Napoleon III. From the slums around Constantinople and the Greek Muslims, Albanian dopers and prisoners to the assassins and slave holders of the imperial Turkish diaspora, Gerome exhibited the grit of honest witnessing, telling the story of foreign lands to the West, for the sake of his countrymen.

Amid the wave of Orientalist art that emerged during his time, Gerome succeeded earlier painters who never traveled to the lands of the Ottoman Empire, such as the Napoleonic propagandist Antoine Jean Gros. The works exhibited in the Orientalist Gallery at the Met are from the collection of the late jewelry designer Kenneth Jay Lane, who donated twenty-six paintings to the museum ten years ago after having promised to give them as a gift. All of the pieces on display are by artists who actually visited Ottoman territories.

As the Greek War of Independence echoed the French Revolution, whose more conservative proponents moved to colonize Algeria for over a century to come, European artists meticulously followed the moral and political disintegration of Ottoman society. The most widely exhibited

artist at the Orientalist gallery inside the Met is Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant, whose painting, *The Sultan's Tiger* (1883) exemplifies the intersection of revolutionary French thought with the traditionally slanted Western view of the Orient as a more primitive place, where rulers act like children, more emotional than rational.

While Benjamin-Constant ventured to Morocco in 1872 early in his career, he was arguably nothing more than a romantic, Eurocentric Orientalist who drew inspiration from the 1827 poem, *The Pasha's Grief* by Victor Hugo for *The Sultan's Tiger*, rather than actually bearing witness to the highest court in Constantinople. Its visual and literary metaphors emasculated Ottoman power, tempting the imperial imagination of newly industrial Western Europe with a dreamy-eyed, moaning sultan who is easily defeated and subject to whim as he crawls toward his dead African tiger.

He often painted scenes from the harem, the quintessential Orientalist theme, of course. Yet still, instead of whiling his way into one, he is said to have brushed oil onto wood and canvas with the verses of Hugo in hand. Unlike his contemporary Gerome, who apparently sought greater authenticity by enduring multiple travels in foreign Ottoman lands, Benjamin-Constant fell back on the Orientalist genre as a form of theater in painting, as seen in his piece, *The Serbian Concubine* (1876). The ladies of the harem are fashionably idle, or more accurately put, held captive, always baring their skin with loose-fitting, transparent clothing.

In his work, *Afternoon in the Harem* (1880), the matchless turquoise beauty of the coastal country is in stark contrast with the opaque curtains of the forbidden private chamber. Among painters like Benjamin-Constant and his loyal patrons, the aesthetic motifs of the Orient merely served as a means for Europeans to express the unseen worlds of history and faith that were burned down with the ancient regime in the fires of industrialization and war after the revolution.

The British had an altogether unique approach to the Orientalist lifestyle and were even less objective. One interesting painting on exhibit from the collection of Kenneth Jay Lane is by an artist known simply as the "British painter." The anonymity of the creator and subject is fitting, as it points to a trend set by the Romantic poet Lord Byron, who immortalized himself with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a book of verse partly inspired by a small city in northwestern Greece where he met the infamous autocrat Ali Pasha, the Lion of Janina.

Lord Byron posed for his painted portrait while wearing the Ottoman dress that he had purchased from an Albanian clothier on his travels. A hundred years later, Oscar Wilde did the same for a photograph. Between them, innumerable Englishmen broke loose from the industrial repressions of Western culture and wandered into Ottoman territory in search of the Orientalist dream, to travel amid the haunts of smoke and rumor that were illustrated in full, picture-perfect color on the canvases of fashionable European painters.

September 2, 1:11 PM  
New York City, USA

## Visions

The island of Manhattan is enigmatic, as its streets are inlaid with invaluable gems of historic creativity. Artifice shows its multifaceted definition in the aesthetic principles of the artists who have found inspiration in the city, and more, who have inspired its residents and travelers from afar, and posthumously, from within.

New York City is almost synonymous with modern Jewish prosperity. It has become a physical and spiritual refuge for an ancient religious minority descended from a nation that barely survived modernity, and for its secular and faith-based traditions now preserved on an urban foundation unmatched in its forward speculation. New York itself is arguably the finest success story of modernism from its heights to its depths in the aesthetic evolution of its skyscrapers and subcultures. And yet, as it ascends to the future, its roots are strengthened.

Nicholas Stavroulakis was born in the American Midwest and lived mostly in England, Israel and Greece. Following his passing on May 19, 2017, at the age of eighty-four, eulogists from Gabriel Negrin, the Chief Rabbi of Athens to the *New York Times*, remembered his life in great detail. Relatively little, though, is relayed about the special relationship he had to New York during his life, and that New York continues to have with him and his artistic legacy.

In 1965, the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan acquired the second impression in an edition of five of his woodcuts titled *Beach Scene* from the Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Rübél Fund. Stavroulakis was then exhibiting his paintings and engravings in one-man shows, beginning in 1960 at the New Forms Gallery in Athens, where he had moved to in 1958, and later in Paris, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and London where he lived prior to study Islamic Art and Architecture.

Among almost 200,000 works of modern and contemporary art collected at MoMA is the one woodcut impression by Stavroulakis. It is currently archived at the Department of Drawings and Prints and depicts an eerie scene of cartoonish family dysfunction. In sharp, ink-black lines, a child stands petrified under and between the aggressive grasp of a man onto the upraised arms of a woman, and they are barefoot with open mouths and whitened eyes. It is a rare and powerful example of his subtle and ingenious artistry set to a modernist subject, and is a stylistic prelude to his keenly researched historical illustrations.

Nine years after he began his promising career as a multidisciplinary visual artist with numerous international solo exhibitions, he returned to academic scholarship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he studied Byzantine icon paintings in one of the oldest inhabited monasteries in the world, Mar Saba in the West Bank. In the decade to follow, he co-founded the Jewish Museum of Greece together with Nouli Vital, Eli Almosnino and Ida Mordoh. As its director from 1977 to 1993, he wrote numerous books, among them the *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*, published by Lycabettus Press in 1986 from Athens.

The sole bookseller in the United States carrying the *Cookbook of the Jews of Greece* is in the Lower East Side of Manhattan inside the second-floor museum at Kehila Kedosha Janina, the only active Romaniote synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. Its current museum director, Marcia Haddad Ikonompoulos, supported Stavroulakis in New York while he raised funds for the restoration of Etz Hayyim in the 1990s. In fact, she was inspired by him as he won recognition for the last Romaniote synagogue in Crete as "One of the Most Endangered Sites in the World" by the World Monument Fund.

His personal encouragement led her to earn equal recognition for Kahal Shalom, the oldest still-functioning synagogue in Greece, located on the island of Rhodes. In that same year of 1999, Etz Hayyim was rededicated. The triumphant efforts they achieved symbolized resilience despite Nazi genocide and ongoing anti-Semitism in Europe.

More than eighty drawings by Stavroulakis are printed within the pages of *The Cookbook of the Jews of Greece*. In it, he pictures all of the textiles, costumes, jewelry, and domestic and religious artifacts that he painstakingly collected and curated for the nine years that he had been director of the Jewish Museum of Greece until the publication of the book, which he also wrote in his refreshingly clear and densely informative prose.

In his opening note on the illustrations, drawn with pen and ink, he explains that they illustrate with historical verity what Jews would have worn from 1820 to 1900. To research the intersections of 19th century Ottoman Greek material culture, he traveled frequently between the markets of Athens and Istanbul, sketching houses of the period still standing in Greece especially. Admittedly, he avoided interpreting past settings that were absolutely unknown to his contemporaries.

In one of his drawings, an Ottoman Greek Jewish man reads from his *siddur* prayer book bound in his *tefillin* phylactery, a sign of morning prayer, as he slips off a *terlik* (slipper) wrapped in the loose-fitting robes characteristic to traditional Turkish-style clothing. Behind him is the artisanal woodcarving that furnishes much of interior Ottoman architecture, especially religious buildings, such as seen in the ark-shaped *bema* inside Ahrida, the oldest synagogue in Istanbul, and in the exquisite restorations at Etz Hayyim in Crete.

In another of his sketches, two caftan-heavy men venture from the Greek peninsula with an eye on Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a perennial landmark for European Jews pilgriming to Jerusalem. And as is particularly important for a cookbook, Stavroulakis captured the tantalizing culinary quality of Greek Jewish fusion cuisine in simple black and white lines, recalling traditions refined for over two millennia by small, tight-knit family-oriented communities.

There are Ottoman-era recipes for *sütlaç*, *simit*, *ravani*, and even *ayran* by Greek Jews who he portrays in one example as a man wearing the fez while strumming an *oud*, and on another page as the undressed and dancing women of the *hamam*.



An even more obscure collection of rare art by Stavroulakis is held uptown in Manhattan, further north from MoMA in the neighborhood environs of Columbia University at the Jewish Theological Seminary Library. A book of sixteen watercolors and accompanying texts by Stavroulakis titled, *Sephardi & Romaniot Jewish Costumes in Greece & Turkey* is retrievable by request from offsite shelves.

Published in 1988, it is the accumulation of creative research that Stavroulakis gathered as director of the Jewish Museum of Greece, which also led to his essay, *The Jews of Greece*, and a book of historical photographs, *Salonica: Jews and Dervishes*.

The watercolors are highly informed and tastefully stylized examples of pre-modern fashion. They place into full color the garments that the Jews of Byzantium, Edirne (Adrianople), Istanbul (Constantinople), Janina (Ioannina), Salonika (Thessaloniki), Izmir (Smyrna), Rhodes and Larissa wore from the 10th to the 19th centuries. A 16th century woman from Edirne wears wooden *hamam* clogs. An 18th to 19th century man from Constantinople is heavily adorned in a white turban. A mid-19th century man from Ioannina wears the traditional red fez, while another mid-19th century man from Larissa is counting his *tasbih* prayer beads.

Beyond his work in Greece to revive cultural history through architectural restoration and museological curation, Nicholas Stavroulakis was first a unique individual artist whose international lifework mirrored his inner, spiritual creativity. He immortalized himself in the names and forms of the past as he envisioned his art closer to the roots of his earthly identity. And he lives on in Manhattan in a rare woodcut impression, inked pages and a book of watercolors that grace some of the more arcane special collections in the museums and libraries of Manhattan.

September 16, 3:19 PM  
New York City, USA

## Neo-Revivalism

Before ethnic nationalism swept people into the religious frenzy of modern borders, imperial territories were under common sway. Despite being far from ideal and altogether incomparable to contemporary life, nostalgia lives in remembrances of Ottoman society. For a person to look at life back then compared to modern life now, the cultural differences seem profound. However, for every taxable subject of the sultan, be they Greeks, Turks, Jews, Armenians, Kurds or the many other and less populous minorities, literal uniformity was the fashion of the day from the 16th to the 19th centuries and for much of Ottoman history.

For men, it was the fez and *cüppe*, a monochromatic, most often if not always black kaftan that hung low from the collared neck to the feet. The fanned white skirt of the *fustanella* that inspired Jean Paul Gaultier would later symbolize Greek national resistance to Ottoman rule. Freedom-fighting revolutionaries were painted aplenty during the early nineteenth century. And, as nowadays, the formal dress of women varied more than that of men. They wore a cap, chemise, vest, coat dress, belt, jewels and the Orientalist *şalwar*, a pair of loose-fitting silk trousers.

Although history defines the *fustanella* as a distinctly Greek traditional costume, there is more to the story where tradition meets fashion in Greece. A border is arguably no less significant than a fold, a cut or a seam. When the nations modernly known as Turkey and Greece were a landscape undivided by the discretion of greater world powers of the industrial West, they were inhabited by people who looked quite the same, in accordance with the dominant fashions. Visible differences in clothing existed between folkloric styles that were among regional attires such as ceremonial dress and informal, domestic garb.

In his artist statement, Jean Paul Gaultier lauded the Benaki Museum of Greek Culture as one of the most beautiful galleries in the world. Its majestic, columned entranceway across from the lush National Garden is picturesquely modern in Neoclassical Grecian style under the isolated peak of the St. Isadore Church that reaches upward from the lofty plains of Athens. His single piece that is on display offers a gorgeous array of art, from antique to contemporary.

Walking through the pearly foyer, Post-modern portraits glorify Antonis Benaki, born of Alexandrian descent during the Greek diaspora in 1873. Throughout the halls of the museum are two separate floors curated with historical collections from before and after the Revolutionary period, when the Greek War of Independence was fought in the years of 1821 and 1832.

Costumes for traditional Greek women are nearly indistinguishable, representing the two eras. Within the costume exhibitions that span popular and folkloric representation across Asia Minor and the Greek diaspora, certain gems of cultural distinction are marked by history. One such piece titled, *Golden Attire*, is a rare bridal costume from the villages of Attica, only worn after Greek independence was won in the fourth decade of the 19th century. Its rectangular shapes and mosaic-inspired golden thread are reminiscent of Byzantine motifs.

Alongside the National Garden is another museum of special importance to the Ottoman heritage of Athens and the shared history represented in Greek-Turkish fashion. It is the Jewish Museum of Greece, which then extended its exhibition, *The Jewish Community of Ioannina: Memory of Artifacts* for two more months. The fifth largest city in Greece, Ioannina, rising its profile ever since the Byzantine era as a gateway city from the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Orient to mainland Europe, has a history of traditions that is unparalleled in the region.

September 30, 12:33 PM  
Athens, Greece

## Silver

The some 100,000 inhabitants of Ioannina have inherited what are arguably the best preserved examples of Ottoman architecture in modern Greece. Its alpine horizon is furnished with two beautifully maintained, though defunct mosques that rise over the lake from the natural rock of the acropolis under often overcast, silver skies.

There are striking remnants of Ottoman architecture throughout the city, such as in the fortress walls of the castle district, built on foundations from Hellenistic antiquity through the Byzantine, Norman, and Venetian conquests.

On Oct. 9, 1430, the Ottomans had not captured Constantinople yet before taking Ioannina from the Despotate of Epirus, an imperial state that succeeded central Byzantine rule. It was then governed by Carlo Tocco, an Italian count from the Ionian island of Cephalonia whose single year of reign primarily concerned the surrender of the city to Sinan Pasha, the *beylerbeyi*, or commander of commanders, of Rumelia, in the present-day Balkans. Earlier, in late March of that year, Sinan Pasha woke at dawn and led his forces to besiege and vanquish Thessaloniki.

The people in Ioannina heard of the tragedy that befell Thessaloniki, and they approached Carlo Tocco with the local bishop in a plea for peace. When Sinan Pasha and his army arrived in Ioannina both parties were prepared for a civil capitulation. It culminated in the Decree of Sinan Pasha, the very first Ottoman document written in Greek referring to a place in Greece. Its declaration enshrined the autonomy of Ioannina, with an unprecedented epochal legacy.

History was relatively kind to Ioannina. According to such scholars as Donald M. Nicol, author of *The Last Centuries of Byzantium* and Ersi Brouskari, editor of *Ottoman Architecture in Greece*, Ottoman imperialism did not initially interrupt economic, political and social life nor the ethnic and religious traditions of the Byzantine era. More, with the later introduction of the Ottoman system of the *millet* administrating ethnic and religious community self-determination, the heart of Ioannina would endure multiple power shifts into modernity.

The Ottomans had not occupied Ioannina for a century before the native Christians revolted in a peasant uprising led by a figure nicknamed the Dog Sage. He was Dionysus the Philosopher and in 1611 sparked Greek antipathy, fueled by arbitrary property confiscations and child abductions. The backlash that ensued continues to define the architectural landscape of Ioannina as Greek Christians were then forbidden residence within the castle district. It soon housed Jews and Turks, whose histories shape the revitalized neighborhoods of Ioannina with nostalgic reminiscence and vintage aesthetics.

The city is a multilayered heirloom that changed hands between lost communities. The revolt of 1611 and the subsequent execution of monks and demolition of the monastery to St. John the Baptist on the northeastern acropolis led not only to the erection of the Aslan Pasha Mosque in its place in 1618, but to a cultural paradigm shift set by Ottoman rule in the region. The current

Municipal Ethnographic Museum of Ioannina, the Aslan Pasha Mosque, is an exotic antiques feast for the Romantic and the Orientalist alike, where authentic Ottoman Turkish script is visibly scrawled onto columns now polished between Jewish, Islamic and Christian folkloric aesthetics richly exhibited alongside one another.

At the highest point of the southeastern acropolis is the Fethiye Mosque, built on the foundations of a metropolitan Byzantine church to the Archangel Michael, where it is said that the Muslims accompanying Sinan Pasha prayed immediately following his decree as a symbol of territorial deference to the Ottoman Empire. It is immaculately preserved with its Islamic elements intact, as are the two remaining marble columns from the original Byzantine church now beside the *mihrab* that once guided prayerful believers in Ioannina to Mecca.

The preeminent Ottoman travel writer Evliya Çelebi saw Ioannina around the year 1670, and left a record of its thirty seven quarters, 4,000-strong population and 9,000 shops, including tailors, goldsmiths and silk merchants. He noted that there were seven mosques in the city, and over thirty more about the local village environs.

Other sources, explored by Nikos Papageorgiou and Eleni Tsimpida tell of seven dervish *tekkes* (Sufi lodges) in 17th century Ioannina too. During this time, French doctor Jacob Spon traveled to Ioannina and confirmed detailed reports from Çelebi that the city was truly prosperous. However, it was not for another century when Ioannina gained its most illustrious, while controversial reputation led by the Lion of Janina, Ali Pasha of Tepelene. Of Albanian descent, Ali Pasha revolutionized Ottoman commerce in Epirus as he expanded international relations and stimulated a cultural revival among his Greek subjects, who he was just as quick to sew into a bag and drown in the lake, along with anyone else who stood against him.

It was while Ali Pasha presided over Ioannina from 1788 to 1822 when the city took its contemporary form with respect to preserving and revitalizing Ottoman architecture. Not only did he oversee the refortification of its castle walls, he declared Ioannina as his own sovereign region called the Pashalik of Yanina, and died for it. As Constantinople ordered him executed, the Greek War of Independence began in central Greece, and was finally won a decade later. British classics scholar David Brewer opens his definitive 2011 study of the Greek War of Independence subtitled, *The Struggle for Freedom from Ottoman Oppression* by explaining how Turkish forces were diverted from the core Greek insurrection because of the need to depose the separatist Lion of Janina.

Ali Pasha followed the bastion system of fortification for his reconstruction of the mainly Byzantine walls protecting the castle. The southeastern acropolis is still named after the Turkish, *Its Kale* (a transliteration from *İç Kale*, meaning ‘inside the castle’), where Fethiye Mosque stands beside the metal-ribbed tomb of the Albanian autocrat and his bygone seraglio, now a former royal manor sheltering the Byzantine Museum.

In recent years, the western bastion, located downhill behind the 1,000-year-old Bohemond Tower, fell into decay until 2007, when the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation began renovating the monumental walls into a museum.

Reconstruction after restoration after rehabilitation went into the chimneys, porticoes and archways throughout the interiors and facades of the Ottoman stonemasonry. The project was finalized and opened to the public in July of 2016, presenting a state-of-the art museum fitted into an authentic representation of pre-modern architectural sophistication. The historic space now illuminates the permanent and current exhibitions of the Ioannina Museum of Silversmithing, glorifying the tradition of metalworking artisans in Epirus, with special comprehensive analyses of the social and economic importance of the craft for Ottoman cultural heritage and its continuity in the postmodern contemporary.

For its commercial importance to Europe, the artisan industries of Ioannina were lauded throughout the eighteenth century, comparable to Marseille for P. Garnier, the French consul in Arta, and a veritable Manchester and Paris of Rumelia to the English diplomat D. Urquhart. Ali Pasha cleverly encouraged Greek-speaking cultural activity in Ioannina, bolstering the modern Greek Enlightenment. The renowned Epirote scholar Neophytos Doukas wrote: "During the eighteenth century, every author of the Greek world, was either from Ioannina or was a graduate of one of the city's schools." Its rustic, countrified Ottoman architecture blends with the landscape in an exquisite fusion of ecology and history.

October 6, 2:09 AM  
Ioannina, Greece

## Urbanistas

The extent of meticulous detail drawn by Salt research for the *Commissioners' Exhibition* is practically unfathomable to the non-specialist. Inspired by the characterful Kemal Kurdaş, former president of the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) in Ankara, who in the 1960s commissioned architectural projects with an eye for the holistic integrity of urbanization, it is a proud intellectual achievement in collaboration with Pamukkale University, PAB architects, and ODTÜ Faculty of Architecture.

A score of individuals contributed to its present form in sharp lines and clear points. Among four floors of presentations shown throughout Salt Galata is the *Map of Women Patrons' Structures in Ottoman Istanbul* at floor -1.

Spanning a temporal scope of four and a half centuries, the *Map* is only a sideshow to the central content of the exhibition's focus yet its implications are far-reaching beyond the sphere of the Salt research library desk. The fifty-plus women represented were typically elites, enjoying familial ties within the fabulously nepotist, bygone Ottoman social circles, and they used that power, economically, and politically at times, among the religious rule, to actively participate in the construction process, to urbanize the ever-expanding imperial capital.

Firuzan Melike Sümertaş led a team at Salt Research with cartographer Murat Tülek to piece together records from an archive dedicated to the memory of the restoration specialist Ali Saim Ülgen with insurance, fire and road maps, street guides, and aerial photographs from the late Imperial to early Republic eras. With graphic designers and editors, they mapped over one hundred and sixty structures, including complexes, waterworks, dervish lodges, mosques, schools, hospitals, and residences built due to patronage from Ottoman women.

Many of the women patrons were especially colorful figures, such as Emetullah Gülnuş Valide Sultan, who commissioned three extant fountains and the demolished Yeni Mosque in Beyoğlu, the closest structures to Salt Galata, as well as the Yeni Valide Complex and Waterway in Üsküdar. Her full name was Devletli İsmetli Emetullah Rabia Gülnûş Valide Sultan Aliyyetü'ş-şân Hazretleri and she wielded it with a fine hand as the last imperial concubine to legally marry an Ottoman sultan. At the age of three she was captured along with her native island of Crete, and enslaved from her Greek birth family of nobles in Rethymno, to later accompany Sultan Mehmed IV on hunting expeditions to the Balkans where she became his favorite enough to bear two future sultans under his name.

She was an enterprising sort to say the least, as she was rumored to have murdered a fellow lady of the harem in order to be closest to the sultan's affections, and afterwards had even ordered the strangulation of her brother-in-law after the birth of her first son. By the time she had built her first fountain and Yeni Mosque in Karaköy the year was 1698, and she was then officially Valide, the mother of the sultan. While her architectural legacy is most glorified in the Yeni Valide

Mosque in Üsküdar, researchers at Salt have brought a fuller picture of her influence throughout Istanbul into focus.

Yeni Mosque was finally torn down in 1959 after it began deteriorating in the early twentieth century though its accompanying fountains remain, despite one of them being defunct and now often covered over with the tools of an itinerant cobbler and construction equipment beside the gate to *Hırdavatçılar Çarşısı* (which translates to ‘Mechanics’ Market’).

Across from the mechanics’ bazaar is Bereketzade Mosque and Islamic school (*madrassah*), which now stands furnished with an exterior plaque memorializing Gülnuş Emetullah Sultan. And inside the market, one of the fountains is still in use where men take moments out the workday to hydrate and wash under three centuries of legacy patronage.

The power and influence of Gülnuş Emetullah Sultan was rare, as she represented a genuine last hoorah in the influence of women in the highest court of Constantinople, especially those of non-Muslim origins. Later women patrons like Verdinaz Kadın, the childless consort to Sultan Mahmud I, did not hold as much sway, as visualized with spectacular graphic precision in the gendered cartography of the *Commissioners' Exhibition*. Her fountain in Galata survives, even while its eighteenth century architectural subtleties are all but banished to modern usage in a truck parking lot within the shorefront bowels of metalwork storehouses.

As Muzaffer Özgüleş explained in his 2017 book, *The Women who Built the Ottoman World*, the power of women was measured by the traditional role they played firstly before they could partake in such socially and intellectually gratifying activities as architectural patronage. The definition of urbanization changed drastically in the last century of the Ottoman Empire, as its fountains remain to tell tales of lost days.

Contemporaries laugh nostalgic imagining the pre-modern world where women circled the elegant stone of fountains under the watchful stare of ambling men who waited for the drop of a kerchief to signify their attraction. Fountains were gendered meeting points. To build one was to serve the people as they maintained the fabric of community socialization within the city as a place where the worlds of men and women could flirt, and with luck, change hands over mutual city planning efforts.

To open their Thursday cinema series at Salt Galata, the 2017 documentary *Citizen Jane: Battle for the City* screened to a packed auditorium fit for over two hundred theatergoers, and still the late and eager stood for lack of seats. Its message of women leading urban development was relevant to the concurrent *Commissioners' Exhibition* that a city signifies its people, not its highways and buildings as the progenitors of Robert Moses and Le Corbusier would assume.

And the *Map of Women Patrons' Structures in Ottoman Istanbul* further attests to the innate social diversity that vitalized Istanbul, one of the greatest cities in history, for over four centuries.



Salt Research is breathing new life into the architectural necropolis that is Ottoman Istanbul with gaining contemporary relevance to the global dialogue on gender equity in cities. They have presented formidable evidence to contest a flagship article "How are women changing our cities?" published by *The Guardian* in 2015, as its author Lucy Bullivant wrote: "Cities are cultural artifacts. Yet we live in cities where nearly 100 percent of the environment around us has been owned, legislated, designed and implemented by men. This is because, outside of monarchic city-builders like Catherine the Great, women have only had access to positions where they could engage in the shape and evolution of cities for the last 100 years."

In *Citizen Jane*, economist and professor Sanford Ikeda said, "If you can understand a city, that city is dead." In the context of the film, he emphasized the central theme that cities live and die on the integrity of daily-changing community foundations, and that, if they are to be sustainable, they must be planned from the bottom-up.

While it is true that the women *urbanistas* who built Constantinople from as early as the sixteenth century mostly represented the highest class where they could have a greater social effect outside of the family, they also included a few court stewardesses, a housemistress and a head of female servants at Topkapı Palace whose deaths are unknown yet who are remembered by the mosques, schools and fountains they built for each other to make a more inclusive city.

October 12, 2:23 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Calligraphic

Among the Islamic arts, calligraphy has distinctly risen to universal appreciation for its pure aesthetic appeal. As a glorification of visual language into a stylistic and functional art tradition, Islamic calligraphy derives from the religious tenet that forbids the illustration of the sacred. It is a belief shared among Semitic linguistic cultures whose liturgies are, among a host of other minority tongues, largely in Arabic and Hebrew, as well as Assyrian, Amharic and Aramaic.

A closer, deeper look at the art of Islamic calligraphy reveals that it is not an expression of spiritual prohibition, but more truly, a medium for creative fulfillment through the hallowed beauty of language itself. It is the discipline of solitude in the stylistic craft of imprinting one single letter at a time, word by word by verse by page, manuscript, and canvas. And as is common to both Hebrew and Arabic, its alphabets are practically devoid of vowel lettering, further emphasizing the religious roots of writing as a way to visualize and guide the ineffable, formlessness of breath, as a metaphor for the unseen spiritual realm through earthly shapes and sounds that reach for the concept of total unity, of completion within and without human artistry.

DemArt is a boutique gallery of Islamic calligraphy in the heart of a neighborhood that continues to honor its past as a Bosphorus shorefront village that nourished a linguistic diversity to rival Jerusalem. Its lost Armenian, Greek and Jewish communities fought and loved each other as children, intermarried as adults, and all while observing every holiday under the moon and sun, inviting each other over their homes about a round of unselfconscious friendship. They are remembered as a historic example of intercultural tolerance. Kuzguncuk nostalgia has become a model for social scientists attempting to reweave its past community fabric as present-day cities across the globe struggle with unprecedented and multifaceted population influx.

The opening of DemArt along a quiet, garden alleyway in a historic home signals a new era in the meaning of social tolerance through art, as the dominant religious culture of the past has resettled within the secular modernism of the prevailing Turkish culture. Its location is not central to the main avenue of the neighborhood where the many local art galleries curate trends in expressionism and caricature. Inside its three stories, the halls are most often absent but for a single host, Ruhi Koca, whose smiling welcome will facilitate any patient viewer's appreciation of the meticulously detailed, well-crafted and surprisingly original pieces of Islamic calligraphy on display.

Its exhibitions are curated with young ateliers from across Turkey, and with special calligraphic commissions from the Iran-based atelier, Ganjineh, after which they are illuminated and framed by Muhammet Mağ at his Üsküdar workshop. Mağ received his *İcazet*, the traditional merit of authority to sign original works and to teach, from renowned master calligrapher Hasan Çelebi, who still lives in Üsküdar. In 2013, he graduated as a student of the *talik* technique under Çelebi, who personally invited Mağ to Istanbul after hearing that he opened and ran the very first, although short-lived calligraphy atelier in his native Erzurum.

Based in Üsküdar for the last nine years, he is not far from DemArt on the Bosphorus esplanade of Paşa Limanı Avenue, closer to the ferry pier and central market where some five centuries ago Mihrimah Sultan sponsored the architect Mimar Sinan to beautify the cityscape with the architectural gifts of his unmoved domes and spires. A year and a half ago, Mağ opened DemArt with Ruhi Koca to blend the contemporary curation of Islamic calligraphy with the multicultural heritage of Kuzguncuk.

Any calligrapher who has obtained the *İcazet* is eligible to exhibit at DemArt, which typically requires eight years of commitment to the master craftsmen *ustas* who have preserved time-honored techniques over generations of personal transmission. The works on display at DemArt are as diverse as the artists themselves. Said Abuzerow hails from Russia, demonstrating his talent within violet and gold illuminations of Quranic verse, signing the names of the first four caliphs inside floral seals of eight-pointed, Ottoman stars. Meryem Nourizi is from Iran, and now lives in the Old City of Istanbul in the district of Fatih. Her matte jade embellishments and rectangular-framed passages are lucid, visual realizations of the elevated syntactic alignment in Islamic scripture.

Other artists from the Mağ calligraphy atelier in Üsküdar exhibited at DemArt are Ali Zaman, originally from Kirkuk, Iraq, whose individual sensitivity for novel design shines through an often rigidly perceived discipline of traditional form. In one of his pieces, he plays with the motif of discontinued circles, as the contents of one pours into the next, forming linguistic crescents in a sequence of abstraction and color through elegant Arabic lines. Halil Mantik explores the frame of the manuscript page and its illumined sacred text with a novel freshness, evoking the Asemic and Post-Literate language arts and visual poetics of his secular contemporaries.

"The old masters worked to preserve a dying tradition. Now, calligraphy is here. It's alive. Ten years ago, this calligraphy was not shown in contemporary galleries. Calligraphers are now experimenting to make it new. It's international. It's beautiful for everyone," said Muhammet Mağ at İncirhane, a cafe close to his atelier, where he sat to converse under an artwork blending Chinese and Islamic calligraphies with a fellow student of the great Hasan Çelebi, a man from South Africa named Muhammed Hobe.

"Calligraphy is a geometric art. It is mathematical. Letters must be drawn to proportion, like in any art. And as an art form it is originally part of Turkish civilization, not Persian or Arabic. To become a calligrapher is not just about art or talent. It builds character. It's about becoming a human being," he said.

Soon after the turn of the millennium, Muhammet Mağ arrived to Istanbul with a reputable academic career and a successful one-man show behind him, albeit from his confessedly artless hometown of Erzurum where he had to close its maiden calligraphy atelier that he himself founded due to lack of means and interest. He had only a single pair of pants, two shirts and five Turkish liras. No one in his family back home even understood art. He would go on to illuminate the works of Hasan Çelebi, one of the world's most sought-after calligraphers, for the next six

years in his Üsküdar workshop before becoming a master calligrapher with a distinct artistic signature. As an illuminator working in color, he often fades crimson hues into the conventional black ink of tradition.

Muhammet Mağ is a singular curator, whose Islamic calligraphy atelier is unexpectedly contemporary behind its nondescript door in a dusty Üsküdar office building. He jokes that becoming a calligrapher takes thirty-four hours a day of practice. He identifies originality in the highly disciplined, traditionally religious art in new pieces that are able to manifest the spirit of individuality objectively and universally for every pair of eyes graced by its appearance.

DemArt was preparing its gallery for a special exhibition scheduled for November, 2017, titled *Esma-ul Husna* dedicated to the names of Allah. While there are only 99 names for Allah in Islam, the calligraphers will surely reinvent them with infinite, creative splendor.

October 17, 9:40 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Afro-Indigenous

Gamze Alpar is a distinctive, independent curator and a vibrant hostess, as she warmly invites arts connoisseurs and the more curious of Istanbul's footsore wanderers for tea and conversation surrounded by examples of the invaluable tangible heritage of Zimbabwe, where she traveled for the first time this past April and soon after for three months in the summer.

She followed in the footsteps of an old friend in Kenya to collect Shona stone art with her associate Murad Geyimci before returning to Istanbul for the September opening of her gallery, Klip Kuns.

In Old Harare she discovered that there are some six hundred Shona artists in Africa who remain dedicated to the craft that continues to place African sculpture among contemporary global art trends long after its crafts revolutionized twentieth century painting. The works of Picasso and his French contemporary Georges Braque speak to one of the most dramatic transformations in art history, that of the development of Cubist painting from African sculpture.

In Afrikaans, Klip Kuns simply means "stone art." It signifies an indigenous African artisan tradition with a singular contemporary relevance to the visual arts world, specifically from the origins of modernist painting, and ultimately since time immemorial. Visual art from Africa is sometimes still typically stereotyped to primitivism, consisting of ceremonial masks and West African sculpture. Shona art, however, has been lauded in the international press and in the world's most prestigious museums as a key proponent of indigenous modernism, as its artists continue to shatter every cliché, label and convention known to come between European thought and the understanding of contemporary African culture.

The earliest European appreciation for African art within the modernist core is widely attributed to the writings of the German-Jewish anarchist and critic Carl Einstein, whose book *Negerplastik* focuses on sculpture and directly influenced avant-garde painters during the interwar period. When it was published in 1915, Zimbabwe was Southern Rhodesia, effectively ruled by the colonial British mining industry who subdued multiple Shona rebellions. Afrikaans was then a minority language and soon its presence would all but vanish from the terrain by 1980 with the independence of Zimbabwe, where speakers of the current ethnic majority language of Shona is spoken most, after English.

In remembrance of the colonial era of Zimbabwe, when Shona art gained its international audience as a distinct, world-class aesthetic discipline, keeping the Afrikaans name of Klip Kuns pays homage to the social history of the contemporary sculpture movement that emerged from the landlocked southern African country of present-day Zimbabwe, whose name literally translates to "House of Stone." In the years leading up to independence, Zimbabwean artists found space abroad to assemble freely in the globalizing world of art exhibitions.

Joram Mariga, the Father of Zimbabwean Sculpture is pictured at Klip Kuns above its exquisite pieces, all by living artists who follow his legacy on the gallery floor. He was among the first of modern Shona artists to exhibit abroad, namely in 1963 at the Royal Festival Hall in London, under the wing of English museologist Frank McEwan who founded what is today the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. For the next sixteen years before Zimbabwe became an independent nation and despite Western sanctions against the blatantly racist Rhodesian government, Shona art was curated in the finest arts institutions in the world, from MoMA in New York City to the Musee Rodin in Paris and beyond.

In 1969, American fashion designer Mary Josephine McFadden married McEwan in Rhodesia while establishing Vukutu, an artist commune for Shona sculptors called the Workshop School. Although the marriage lasted a year, the artists who emerged from her sculptural farm now grace the pantheon of Shona artists. They are now celebrated at Klip Kuns.

The portraits of Nicholas Mukomberanwa, Henry Munyaradzi, and Joseph Ndandarika recall the inspired ingenuity that cropped up from Vukutu, offering art historians and worldly aesthetes a clear and expansive view on a history of African independence through fine arts production.

Alpar displays the core values of Shona sculpture with multifaceted sophistication about her gallery in a free-flowing open-house exhibition style integrating textual and photographic elements to embellish hundreds of ingenious sculptures by about fifty artists. She personally met most of her gallery artists whose works she curates for niche art markets in Istanbul and across the globe. Taurai Chimba, for example, is a rare name in the international spotlight among new Shona artists. Two of his soapstones at Klip Kuns depict playful, mythic characters reminiscent of the Inuit aesthetic of the Indigenous Arctic, yet with an altogether unique, authentic formalism that leaves aficionados wondering how Cubism and Shona art differ at all.

On any given day, Alpar receives visitors and patrons from across the global social spectrum at Klip Kuns, such as American metalwork and ceramic artist Castro, who speaks to art history and creative independence with an uncommon ease, demonstrated by his special talent. When asked if he is inspired by Shona art, he answers promptly in the negative. To him, arts appreciation and creative work are separate worlds. He confidently asserts pure, individualistic originality in his craft while discussing the debt owed by famous painters to the African sculptors who inspired Cubism.

Where an immediately unmistakable nude sketch by Picasso stares from a ledge on one of the many gallery walls decorated with Shona sculptures, Castro shared lucid thoughts on African art and artistic integrity as Alpar deepened the conversation with excitable bursts of insight from her peerless experience as the only known Turkish curator dedicated entirely to Shona art. She muses comfortably on everything from her days in Zimbabwe to a recent Klip Kuns gallery loan for the set of a new film by Serra Yılmaz and Ferzan Özpetek.

Shona artists carve butter jade, serpentine, spring stone, black and white opal, verdite and soapstones to conjure vast ranges of emotion from mineral surface. As is traditional to the indigenous philosophy of Shona art, the stones are thought to take sculptural form by the will of ancestral spirits. The artists refrain from premeditated sketching and from using sophisticated tools beyond simple pickaxes and cutters so as not to interfere with the creative source.

Wildlife and villagers are among the recurring subjects befitting the cross-genre definition of neorealist naturalism, such as the ribbed rhinoceros by Yardaro R. Mudenda. And there are abstract, expressionistic pieces more akin to Cubist affinities, as in the monolithic portrait impressions of Second Mappfumo and Nhamo Iasi on display at Klip Kuns alongside similarly innovated pieces with titles like, *Matrix*, *Spiral Face*, *Wise* and *The God of Storm*. And other works, such as *Eagle* and *Love* demonstrate syncretic aesthetics that blend the equally sophisticated techniques behind both traditional forms and contemporary stylizations.

Klip Kuns is the only gallery in Turkey with a sole focus on Shona art. Its aesthetic philosophy contrasts with a special significance beside traditional Turkish art, as there is no comparable stone sculpture tradition in Turkey given the historic Islamic prohibition against graven images. Alpar is wide-eyed and ambitious. She was planning wintertime ventures to Zimbabwe to strengthen her ties with the local artisan community while setting her sights on Toronto, Dubai, Paris and elsewhere to broaden the creative space for contemporary Shona art to continue to flourish with distinction worldwide.

October 28, 11:15 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Unseen

The steeply woven streets of Çukurcuma are a phantasmagoria of popups, galleries, designers, workshops and collectors. The neighborhood is more surreal in contrast to the historic core of Istanbul across the inlet shores of the Golden Horn, where the mystic horizon of the old city gives way to an otherworldly aura. They are at opposite sides of the social spectrum. And yet, BLOK art space is anomalous for its cross-cultural, site-specific work that spans disparate urban geographies from its exhibition space that juts out from a sloping corner in Çukurcuma where Faik Paşa Avenue meets Erol Taş Street, and off-site, at an installation room in the 17th-century Ottoman inn, Büyük Valide Han.

BLOK art space in Çukurcuma is relatively spare, though effective in its simplicity. The exhibit by Sahand Hesamiyan is *Majaz*, a self-made gallery installation organized by Mine Kaplangı to demonstrate a diverse range of spatial perspectives under stylistic lighting. The forms of contemporary sculpture elaborate and expose the apparent emptiness between shadow and concept in traditional design architecture. It ran through November as a downtown portal from the expansive contemporary art realm to the worldly definitions of history and religion as they have patterned the life of the city for centuries.

*Majaz* is Persian for “metaphor”, among various translations for the figurative and unreal. It can also be thought of a closer to the spiritual, the unseen, as the imperceptible, formless soul that makes architecture inhabitable, especially when built for religious and metaphysical purposes. Sahand Hesamiyan draws from his cultural surroundings as an artist born and based in Tehran. It is specifically the Islamic architectural concept of the *muqarnas* that he elaborates in his primary stainless steel works and raised, gilded paper designs shown at BLOK art space in Çukurcuma.

While BLOK art space began with intentions to welcome and embrace collaborative local art on the immediate streets about the neighborhood, it soon realized a grander inclusive scope in one of the two hundred and ten rooms of Büyük Valide Han amid its exotic, four-hundred-year-old ambiance. Every Saturday, a guide from the gallery leads the more curious of Istanbul's art lovers by tram over the Galata Bridge for a creative exercise in cultural time travel. Gülin Ören is a cinema theory student who then worked at BLOK art space to escort fresh eyes from Çukurcuma to Eminönü while sharing her special conversational brilliance enough to pierce the veils of history and religion with the story of *Majaz*, and most importantly, its experience.

Sahand Hesamiyan adapted the sacred geometry of Islamic architecture with his essentialist aesthetic. A revolving light penetrates through his steel work to cast an optical illusion of three-dimensional shadows against the interior of a single-domed room inside Büyük Valide Han. Its effect is enlightening as it uplifts the archaic forms of historical worship with timeless creativity. Hesamiyan reanimates the decrepit burdens and sobering realities of the age with a liveliness that evokes the innocence of a first-time traveler.



As the traditional Islamic regions and its peoples tire of ceaseless, heavy-handed cliches and grow increasingly weary of the ongoing conflicts between exploitation and fundamentalism, structural artists like Hesamiyan are deepening the base on which collectives of pride and identity may stand taller to mature toward creative independence. While observing simulations of night and day under the spell of Buşra Tunç, who worked with Hesamiyan to research light and shadow at the Büyük Valide Han site, the twofold BLOK art space show provokes the enigma of the past to rear its ghostly face, as it is reborn from the unseen art of contemporary sculpture.

The installation's visitors listen to the meditative, enchanting instrumental *Mahtaab* by the Iranian musician Hossein Alizâdeh. Its title translates equally from Turkish and Persian as the poetic image of the moon's reflection over water. *Majaz* is a trans-historical experiment that strikes at the root of Istanbul's social foundation, and it is achieved with awe-inspired gravity behind a nondescript door within the medieval confines of Büyük Valide Han. The cracked stone wall beside the industrial metal door into the site bears the BLOK art space insignia, yet down the hall the complex of activity is as puzzling, and mystifying as the history of the space itself. African garment stitchers work beside costumed period actors. A man whose appearance resembles another era polishes a Byzantine lamp across the hall from a French literature scholar and jeweler.

Between her enslavement and assassination, Mahpeyker Kösem became synonymous with unequivocal female power in the Ottoman Empire, as she rose from imperial consort to serving as wife and mother to four sultans. In 1623, during the initial year that she commissioned an anonymous architect to build Valide Han in her name, which still functions as a business multiplex known as Istanbul's largest historical inn, she became Valide Sultan, the official title of the sultan's mother. Her son, Murad IV was only eleven years old when he ascended the throne, leaving her to rule the empire.

In the courtyard of Valide Han, a 17th-century Shiite mosque continues to receive congregations from the Iranian minority in Istanbul whose cultural heritage is intimately linked with Ottoman-Turkish language, art and tradition. In bygone times, Persian bachelors lived in the inn above the small factories whose merchants assembled to hawk wares a short walk from the Grand Bazaar. The work by Hesamiyan completes a circle of time, as the pre-modern setting of his installation is woven through Istanbul's contemporary multicultural fabric. *Majaz* speaks to the perpetuity of the Turkish-Persian cultural exchange in the present, and also recalls its deeper relationship which conceived the early strains of Turkish Islam. There is a quiet and gorgeous subtlety to *Majaz* as it honors that spiritual kinship by sharing collective space with local Iranian Muslims.

Walking to and from Valide Han is a trial for the senses, as its elaborate *muqarnas*-sculpted gateways and narrow pedestrian corridors wind through a mind-numbing chaos of clothing and textile retailers whose peculiar characters and manners echo with the regional influences of the centuries. As she smilingly asks the way from countless salesmen, Ören openly expresses her creative intellect. She enjoys the opportunity to see the *Majaz* installation repeatedly as a BLOK art space guide, appreciating the artwork uniquely based on her understanding of the

cinematograph, one of the earliest devices projecting film. And as in cinema, where the celestial environment is of utmost importance — as people commonly watch movies after dark in contrast to projected light — Islamic architecture is set to the dynamic of night and day, along with its traditional musical modes (*maqam*) and prayer rites (*namaz*).

"In a sense, every period conceptualizes, analyzes, or reflects upon its own city in the context of the zeitgeist. When the city in question has ancient roots like Istanbul, the number of locations that the contemporary artist can create a dialogue with, partake in, form a relationship to include the viewer in the experience becomes countless," wrote Esra Aliçavuşoğlu in the BLOK art space exhibition publication for *Majaz*, translated by Ayışığı Hale Gönel.

The existential practice we form with the space is in this sense more important than we figure, as it is a necessary element in forming ourselves. Similarly, in a socially produced space that has kept up with cultural transformations since the 17th century, Sahand Hesamiyan navigates the corridors of Büyük Valide Han with what he calls ‘the mesmerizing guidance of light,’ searches for and finds traces of his own cultural past, the building's memory, and the geography that the artist was born in and grew up with, and allows the viewer to experience a metaphor of this archaeology.

November 6, 1:51 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Postcards

While the Jewish heritage of Istanbul is widely celebrated for its Sephardic culture and the Greek-speaking Romaniotes who came before, the Eastern European Ashkenazi Jews who lived in the eye of the Sublime Porte were a special minority within many minorities. By 1894, the Union of Ashkenazi Tailors finished building *Beth ha Kenesseth Tofre Begadim*, which, from the Hebrew, essentially means the Tailor's Synagogue. It was a house of worship for generations of clothiers who had settled on the northern shores of the Golden Horn not far from Karaköy port. Historically, the Bosphorus had been a pilgrimage link to Jerusalem for cities on the Black Sea coast like Odessa, where the Jewish community made up over a third of the population by the turn of the century.

By the late nineteenth century, the Ashkenazi community needed a Chief Rabbi. They read the international Jewish press for candidates. German papers mentioned a distinguished rabbi named Dr. David Markus originally from the Poland-Prussian border, though educated in the Netherlands and Germany, where he taught classical languages and mathematics. As an Enlightened Jew of the *Haskalah*, he had received a secular education in psychology and philosophy and worked diligently to modernize Jewish life. He pursued his work in Istanbul after arriving in the year 1900, eventually transforming community development in the oldest Jewish neighborhoods of Hasköy and Balat with German aid. His efforts revitalized an unused synagogue, and after gaining Turkish nationality following the Constitutional Monarchy of 1908 he encouraged Turkish language learning among Jews. Finally, he bridged the enmity between Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities, who had ceased intermarrying over disputes, and established a modern education system for Jews in Istanbul.

The Tailor's Synagogue became the Schneidertempel Art Center in 1996 under the auspices of the Dr. Markus Cultural Association fifty years after congregants moved religious ceremonies a short walk away to Yüksekaldırım, the second of three Ashkenazi synagogues in Istanbul, and the only one still holding active services. Since the inaugural art exhibition at Schneidertempel in 1999, the center has held numerous shows celebrating everything from photography to caricature, music, literature, tango, painting, and currently historical postcards. In the winter of 2008, cartoonist Izel Rosental launched his book, *Aquarium* at Schneidertempel, where he has become a public figure and multigenerational community member, as his grandparents were married at the Tailor's Synagogue.

Rosental recounted the facts of his illustrious local heritage at Schneidertempel with a bright smile one early November evening to mediate a panel of fellow high school students from Lycee Saint Joseph. They could hardly contain themselves as they beamed with friendship and laughter throughout the course of the event held to discuss the current exhibit, *The Eyes of the Levant*. Seyhun Binzet spoke first, as the postcard collector. He owns more than 15,000 and has given exhibitions to highlight various aspects of them in Bursa, Çanakkale, and London.

In the thirteenth century, seafaring Italian merchants coined the place name "Levant" to mean the Eastern Mediterranean. It is a term from another era, before boundaries carved the land into the American and British colonial concept known as the Middle East and its surrounding postcolonial nationalities. It refers to a geography without modern definitions. *The Eyes of the Levant* is an exploration of a historical theme, and offers a special perspective on the present as curated within Schneidertempel. The transformation of synagogues around the world into museums and cultural centers is part of a general paradigmatic shift likened to revisiting antique and vintage postcards. It is well-expressed in a Sephardic proverb: "Two Jews, four synagogues."

At a point in time, practical use becomes secondary to cherishing the preservation of memories. Schneidertempel doubles as publisher and bookseller, purveying rare gems such as *Anyos Munchos i Buenos*, a wonderfully comprehensive photographic and textual work on the Sephardic Jews of Turkey by Ayşe Gürsan-Salzman and Laurence Salzman.

In the Schneidertempel exhibition catalogue to *The Eyes of the Levant*, there is a short historical treatise on the region, richly explained from the earliest era through the defining Arab conquest of the eighth century which remains the dominant social milieu. Binzet chose two hundred and seventy postcards for the current exhibition dated between 1890 and 1920. They are rife with daily observations and emotional confessions in the languages of Ottoman Turkish and French, the global language at the time. Film producer Engin Özden designed the exhibit with Binzet in minute geographical detail to expand on the colorful primary source material of the postcards, sent from over thirty cities from the modern-day countries of Syria, Lebanon and Israel.

When he spoke with the panel, Binzet compared the postcards to pre-modern social media, at which point younger audience member declared that they were intended to be snapshots of moments that pinpointed a sender's location with relative ease and speed through postal routes. They also conveyed the visual and linguistic trends of the day. Beyond popular culture, they documented highly personal excavations from the immediate experiences of private lives while forwarding visuals from broadly diverse local societies. Binzet remembered two postcards that depicted the same battle, against a Turkish army. In one, the soldier proudly described the battle as a success. The other maintained that it was awful enough to attempt a medical discharge ruse.

While many mosques and churches are represented in the postcards, along with fundamentally sacred places like the interiors of the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, synagogues are extremely rare. He mentioned one in his collection, from Edirne. The religious proscription that forbids visualizing the sacred in Judaism includes picturing synagogues. And to write on such an image is all the more sinful in Orthodox tradition. That said, there are many postcards on Jewish life. Almost all of them offer special contributions to the historical record. As a land whose people have endured misappropriation among colonialists and invaders lost in multiple translations, primary source material is perpetually revealing, and all the more so when placed in a new light, as at *The Eyes of the Levant*. One postcard is inscribed in French under a meticulous graphic of the Tabernacle, the portable temple of the exiled Israelites.

When he first gathered his collection for the exhibit, Binzet excitedly called his old high school friend, the retired Galatasaray University professor of French philology, Osman Senemoğlu, who initially thought he was being asked to speak about the Levantines, the moniker that many Turkish historians use for non-Muslim European traders in Ottoman territories. He clarified the hurried speech of Binzet to prepare a lecture on the linguistic origins of the Levant. That most of the postcards are written in French summons the expansionist notion of *La France du Levant*, as led by the descendants of French Protestants exiled after the French Revolution. Engin Özden followed his discussion to conclude by emphasizing that *The Eyes of the Levant* is a geographical exposition, and there are manifold layers to the postcards, from its storytelling to its sociology and well beyond, to historic truths that are often much stranger than fiction.

November 8, 12:07 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Fringe

After the third coup d'état in Turkish history officially overthrew civilian governance on Sept. 12, 1980, many internally displaced teachers were exiled to the city of Van in eastern Anatolia on the edge of an alpine mountain lake near the Iranian border. They were the leftist idealists who evaded hundreds of thousands of prison sentences across the country, taking refuge in the colder, far-flung provinces where the soil was rich with Armenian heritage. They were also multi-talented humanists who gave the local children special education, deeply informed by the harsh political reality that everyone confronted with a tragic optimism.

Before she was an artist, writer and curator, Öğrenci was among the students taught by the post-1980 coup political exiles into secondary school. After moving to Istanbul, she pursued architecture, which she approached with her distinct creative sensibility. In the global metropolis she became disillusioned with the social atmosphere, distant in more ways than one from her small town upbringing in Van, with its innate eastern communalism. Even as she gained success as a writer and architect, she still felt an emptiness, one that she has since occupied with her independent artist initiative, MARSistanbul.

Since transforming the architectural research office that she opened in 2000 into a socially-engaged exhibition space run by artists, she has dedicated her leadership to international social critique. Twenty-five shows have graced the floor at MARSistanbul with a radical penchant for risky subjects and sensitive regions. Öğrenci has curated at MARSistanbul since conceiving the *Crystal City* exhibit in 2011, a literary exploration by artists who traced the footsteps of the Italian novelist Italo Calvino to question city-dwelling. Her dense writings accompany exhibitions and they are exacting treatises on the social philosophies and historic momentums recurrent within contemporary art, musing on such themes as capitalism, ecology, migration and war. She publishes with alternative media like the Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos* before posting well-written English translations online at the MARSistanbul site.

"The space was empty. I was not working in the office and I invited Erim Bayrı for the Spring Exhibition. It was quite successful. People asked what's next," said Öğrenci, who named her initial office MARS after the Turkish acronym for "Architectural Research Studio" and later turned it into an artist's initiative space after she ceased her work as an architect. "I prefer Art Initiative more than Artist Run Space. There is no Turkish term for 'artist run space.' Some artist run spaces are commercial where artists show their own artworks. MARS is different. I've shown twice in seven years. I invite artists and curators. It's not my first goal to show my works."

After a two-year hiatus, MARSistanbul reopened in 2016 in the basement of its original two-floor storefront window space in Firuzağa on Bostanbaşı Avenue with a solo exhibition by Öğrenci titled, *Awaiting the onset of the sense of life*. One of her more recent works, *A Gentle Breeze Passed Over Us*, filmed a strongly personal and stunningly artful account of an Iraqi musician migrating desperately through Turkey to reach Vienna. It appeared for Collateral, the last show also featuring *9 Days from My Window in Aleppo* by photographer Issa Touma, who

received the 2016 European Short Film Award for bravely documenting the beginning of the Syrian Civil War.

"MARSistanbul is a free space. In the arts scene there are many institutions, galleries and museums, but they are all in the arts sector. You need free space. We are totally free. For five to six years I had no sponsor. I was the only sponsor. Just last year, SAHA [an association supporting contemporary art in Turkey] decided to support MARSistanbul," Öğrenci continued. "My writings and all of my artworks are always related with daily life, our simple daily life, our streets, our meetings, coincidences, everything can be my subject. I don't plan a year in advance. I follow my daily life. If I meet an artist who fits with MARS, I invite them. It can be for a show or a performance."

Each new MARSistanbul exhibition takes around two months to prepare, and the space hosts four shows a year, typically in spring and autumn. Performance art, film screenings and various live events are now held in the floor below the Arabica Trading House coffee company, as Öğrenci plans for more daily pop-up events like screenings, performances and artist talks. With one assistant who opens the gallery on certain weekdays, Öğrenci works in true DIY fashion and her collaborators are kindred spirits.

The November exhibition, *Willing the Possible*, was curated by London-based artist and curator Minou Norouzi, who initiated Sheffield Fringe in 2011 as an artist-led curatorial project. While working with the Artists at Risk (AR) program, Öğrenci met Norouzi in Athens in the summer of 2017 at *documenta14*, a historic exhibition series that began by restoring modern art appreciation in postwar Germany. They discussed the meaning of exile and classist privilege within the international art sphere.

*Willing the Possible* is based equally on an article Norouzi read by Judith Butler and from a poem by the Palestinian national icon Mahmoud Darwish. "I usually start with one film and pivot the selection around it. In this case it was Emma Leach's 'Conflicting Thoughts: Thoughts on Conflict' (2011)," Norouzi wrote, about her process curating *Willing the Possible*.

The intention was to acknowledge how ill-equipped we are in dealing mindfully with conflict, or with conflicting positions. The films included in *Willing the Possible* come into dialogue with each other.

From such chance meetings, most often in European capitals like Helsinki or Vienna, Öğrenci develops MARSistanbul from her intuitive taste one day at a time. She had no prior experience with contemporary art curation before founding MARSistanbul and as an artist herself she does not sell art or accept applications. Judging and marketing do not align to the authentic basis of her artist initiative. Like Norouzi, Öğrenci sees herself as an artist more than a curator. Architecture is her starting point. Whether it's a text or an exhibition, creating space is essential as she reflects on her perennial themes, from life Anatolia to the experience of migration.

Öğrenci remembers the Istanbul in the 1990s, when she moved to the city. She went to the cinema for the first time at seventeen, as there were none in her Anatolian hometown, not even a theater. She soon frequented SinePop in Beyoğlu. She fell in love with a new film every week. By the end of her architectural degree, she was attending art biennales. When she failed to understand certain pieces, she taught herself how to appreciate them with research. At that time, art books were gaining in popularity, more so than architecture books. From there, she dove into the contemporary arts world with her strong feminist leanings and has not looked back.

MARSistanbul balances the famous and emerging, such with the Chicago-based performing artists Theaster Gates and Oliver Ressler, the progressive Austrian videographer. There is also equal representation for men and women, and for group and solo shows, while mainly in the form of short films, and with an annual feature on urban architecture. Until December, the exhibit *Willing the Possible* showed four unique films. Among them, *Electrical Gaza*, a piece by the Palestinian-English film artist Rosalind Nashashibi and *The Goodness Regime*, a celluloid caricature on Norwegian involvement in Palestine by Jumana Manna and Silke Störhlein, offered particularly insightful and inspiringly fresh contexts in which to compare hotly contested perspectives on global discourse. Since its underground resurrection in 2016, MARSistanbul has continued as a hidden gem, worldwide, for artistic and social freedom.

November 12, 1:02 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Illusions

In its heyday under Sultan Abdülmecid I, while international naval conflicts raged around the Crimean Peninsula, the musty, searing air of the Tophane cannon foundry was filled with tubercular bacteria, as were its floors where blistery-eyed men heaved and wheezed over the casting grind to round spheres of iron into weapons of war. From pits caved into the bare earth, laborers fumed amid the ceaseless, fatal sizzling that pierced through the acoustics of the high-walled domes as they slid molten metals with painstaking nerve beside flame-retardant barrels of honey and cisterns of water emptying with a blast over the factory floor when a fire blazed.

In late October, in the Tophane Sarnıç (Cistern), twenty-nine untitled canvases by the late, contemporary painter Ismail Altınok appeared on the walls of the medieval weapons plant for the current gallery show, organized by his son, Dr. Mehmet Altınok. The artist is a proponent of Op-Art, a modernist tradition that designs complex and repetitive geometric forms to create manual, two-dimensional optical illusions. Its effect is an analog treatment of the bygone abstractions of metal and fire, honey and water, blood and sweat as they mixed and coursed through the historic space. The freethinking British biologist Rupert Sheldrake refers to such metaphysical influences on the patterns of time as morphic resonance.

Born in the southwestern Turkish province of Burdur in 1920, Altınok soon passed the local Taurus mountain range to seek an education in Ankara, where he launched his creative vocation as an artist with an unrivaled grasp of current, global trends. After completing his studies in 1943, he held his first painting exhibition in Ankara in 1948. Seven years later he went to Paris for a month to participate in a group exhibition. By 1959, the Italian government supported him financially as he painted freely in Rome for another four months.

Along with his fellow Ankara schoolmates, such as renowned painters Eşref Üren and Cemal Bingöl, he represents the generation immediately preceding contemporary Turkish artists at work today who exist on the battered front of the nation's cultural horizon with rare and obscure openings such as at the Tophane Sarnıç — in Turkish the Cistern of Tophane — to reimagine the domestic field often plagued with deafening nostalgia and intractable rhetoric. Following in the dizzying footsteps of Altınok, new artists in Turkey advance traditional forms readily inspired by the present with freshly vital, and forwardly positive means of self-transformative expression.

The year Altınok went to Paris, the Galerie Denise Rene held its defining *Le Mouvement* exhibition that April, essentially establishing Op-Art as a recognized contemporary form along with its aesthetic pair, kinetic sculpture. The latter sought to permeate exhibition space, while the former suffused the senses of its viewers from within. Both were absorbed in the idea of motion as a pivotal fixation for pieces that were often drawn from excavations of film technology and avant-garde experimentalism. The show launched careers, as for Jesus Rafael Soto, who would integrate Op-Art into Venezuelan visual culture. It also lionized iconoclastic celebrities like Marcel Duchamp, curating his art of industrial decontextualization from the interwar period

comparatively with younger artists whose work was based on the scientific introspections of the postwar tech boom.

From 1945 to 1960, the Paris School had its way with many Turkish artists, among them were Abidin Elderoğlu, Hasan Kavruk and Ismail Altınok, who developed formal abstraction into his special approach to Op-Art. To lyricize the recognition of shapes was the modus operandi for the initial artists who found muses in the Paris School. Within its growing movement of adherents, Altınok sought to visualize a pictorial language through positive-negative color arrangements, which he achieved with mathematical precision. At the same time he juxtaposed illustrations of natural rhythms into geometric repetitions, skillfully rendering optical illusions in paint. His works transfix viewers to experience art viscerally, drawn into mutual interactions between the globular eye and the rectangular frame as directed by the manifestations of one visionary mind. When Altınok won the The State Painting and Sculpture Exhibition Achievement Award in 1975, it was clear that Op-Art had a place in Turkish art history.

Although his earliest works were essentially landscapes born of the Anatolian countryside with its infinite knolls stretching out over the vast glacial plateau, the Tophane exhibition revolves around his evolutionary concentration on Op-Art. Walking through the industrial green doors into the historic cistern, with the minarets of Nusretiye Mosque looming overhead, the immediate canvas in sight is a triptych in four colors, etched and shaded into a sharp, metallic web of diagonals and points. The piece depicts the fundamental shift in his aesthetic transition from the purely abstract to the optical illusion.

Housed in three contiguous rooms against flat brick aside mahogany-hued doors, the Op-Art of Altınok, as exhibited in Tophane, could be said to have emerged over the course of three basic developments. Firstly, a pair of his paintings in the collection are visibly more nebulous than the rest, almost completely vague but for pasty smears and runs of the various brush sizes he employed, dashing this way and that with a relatively colorless palette in one, and a more contrasted saturation in the other. They have all of the signs of a nascent chaotic phase before coming to fruition with more exacting clarity. Secondly, there are certain pieces that demonstrate a less diverse, more rudimentary and defined relationship to color, yet that play with the perception of texture through the placement of isolated, multilayered shapes. In the second phase, he is painting multiple canvases in one. From there, he departs from the motifs in the triptych toward repetitive patterns within concave-convex angles, provoking a sense of warped perspective and virtual space created by the mind when looking at such disorienting and unfamiliar variations in form and color. Finally, most of the paintings displayed at his Op-Art exhibit are dedicated to one central theme at a time, which he exhausts and intensifies with minute color grading and the subtle expansion and contraction of mirrored forms.

Ultimately, the Op-Art movement has been a critical failure, generally speaking. Those who initially perused its systematic intricacies were left unsatisfied with the medium of paint as a probable vessel to develop the perceptual revolutions triggered by computer science. It had its grandest hurrah at MoMA in 1965 with *The Responsive Eye* exhibition, although its origins stem

from the 19th century treatise, *Theory of Colors* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The most famous work of the Op Art movement can be said to be *Blaze* (1964) by Bridget Riley, whose style followed her experience in advertising, as it did for her contemporary, Victor Vasarely.

Into his eldest years, before Altınok passed away in 2002 at eighty-two years of age, he would sit with an accomplice under the shade of a tree and look out over a verdant field to blissfully reflect the soul of the land one brushstroke at a time. He gave the earth he painted new life with his highly visible, post-realist daubs of formless color that ran across his canvases like deep runnels springing with spiritual vivacity.

The pieces at his posthumous Op-Art exhibition run parallel as they infiltrate the left brain intellect with a powerful invitation to join him in the afterlife of his crafty intuition, his infinite visions. Crystalline, rainbow triangles and flat, labyrinthine spirals move like surprise hallucinations and unforgettable mirages as they rise up from the unseen source of human creativity and vanish in the instant blink of a broken stare.

November 19, 12:49 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Post-Impressionism

In the summer of 1870, Paul Cezanne dodged the Franco-Prussian War draft and found respite in a village he knew from childhood, L'Estaque in Provence. The year he spent there before returning to the capital was just what he needed to break away, both from the mounting social pressures and the inescapable artifices of his unbridled genius. He had single-handedly presaged modern expressionism during his so-called "dark period" in Paris the decade prior, using a palette knife to carve into paint his exasperated illustrations of rape and murder in brazen contrasts of color. The landscapes of L'Estaque opened his eyes wide enough for him to see an opening into the emerging impressionist movement.

*Houses at L'Estaque* revives the muse that fired the imagination of Cezanne, who ultimately evolved the painting styles of his contemporaries into a liminal category known as post-impressionism. Inside the second-floor gallery of the Narmanlı Apartment building, the exhibit at Ariel Sanat displayed the works of Selim Birsell and Sinan Logie, two Brussels-born, genre-defying artists who continually innovate new creative niches in Turkey. Its walls spanned three rooms, spare and direct in presentation, though with elegant aesthetic fusions of traditional modernism. Alongside one another, the works of Birsell and Logie reveal the bridge from impressionism to post-impressionist expressionism which Cezanne initiated.

In the year 1932, the Narmanlı Apartment building rose above the demolished foundations of a mansion owned by a descendant of Ottoman royalty. It was one of many that appeared at a time when street names and numbers were still inconsistent following the dissolution of the imperial establishment. Its interior retains original fixtures and furnishings, showing off the high styles of the bygone upper-class during the golden, early days of the Republic era when Atatürk still lived.

Adjacent to the lush urban valley of Maçka Democracy Park amid the trendiest of downtown core districts, its neoclassical columns and Ottoman mantle open into a brilliant, spacious marble foyer leading to the live-in doorman — in Turkish, the *kapıcı* — who fulfills a heartwarming convention among the old Turkish society. He appears as receptionist and keeper below an outmoded Zenith clock and beside the antique, bronze-hued cast-iron shaft elevator to invite guests up.

On the nose, at 4:00 p.m. sharp, on a Thursday, the doors to Ariel Sanat opened quietly, and unceremoniously to commence the three-month *Houses at L'Estaque* exhibition. Artist and collector Bilge Alkor founded the gallery as a place not merely reserved for shows, but also to foster research and collaboration among the diverse parties involved in the production and curation of local and international art. Her impulse was based on a flash of insight drawn from the mythological figure of the sylph in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In the gallery, the airborne aesthetic is clear, as the descriptive elements of *Houses at L'Estaque* float in pieces across variously framed loose fragments of pages. Within them are pearls of appreciation to illuminate the intent of the space as parallel with the central vision of abstract art, namely to make the invisible visible.

And further, as espoused by an anonymous typewritten piece of paper tacked to the wall in the entranceway, the art at Ariel Sanat is displayed to have the effect of the echo of a question in the mind. “In the beginning there was no beginning,” it reads. “Whatever happened has happened in the middle.” Finally, before leading those in attendance to see the works of Selim Birsal and Sinan Logie, the curatorial note makes an eloquent plea of spiritual respect to Mt. Sainte-Victoire, the mountain in Provence where Cezanne painted the second of his two most important works of post-impressionism. The first is known simply as *L’Estaque* (1883–1885)

Norgunk Publications designed the conceptual framework of the exhibit. Housed inside a venue called Riverrun, the freshly-opened literary, arthouse cafe complex near Istanbul Modern, named after a line in the anti-novel *Finnegan’s Wake* by James Joyce, purveys the art of Selim Birsal, as well as Bilge Alkor among others with a strong, collective style. For his part in *Houses at L’Estaque*, Selim Birsal is showing eighteen watercolors on paper. The first of them is a series of fourteen pieces heavily filtered in a rusty maroon tone, painted from 2007 to 2013 and titled *Night*. Its running motifs deliver the essence of post-impressionism into the contemporary, as he fuses the shapes and textures of L’Estaque’s architectural exteriors through carefully studied homages to Cezanne’s pre-cubist forms.

Late in 1998, Selim Birsal interviewed with Beral Madra, who at the time worked for the Turkish architectural magazine, *Arradamento-Mimarlık*. At present, she is chief curator at BM Contemporary Art Center near Ariel Sanat in Nişantaşı. They spoke at length. Birsal, who was educated in France, began by saying that there was effectively no more than ten contemporary artists working in Turkey, and that curators who were not also artists were few and far between. Fast forward nearly two decades and Madra has curated over one hundred and twenty international exhibitions while Birsal exhibits his art in Turkey still deeply informed by French cultural history and its famously inspiring landscapes.

As an inheritor of early postmodernism, Birsal is far from a landscape painter. His works are multilayered and employ mixed media techniques into reflexive foci. And yet, an overall sense of approachable beauty, while stark and often challenging, is refreshingly present in the highly contemporary contexts of the work. His second series of three watercolors are shot through with a green haze titled *Moss City*. They are airy reflections on the sylphic resonance of Ariel Sanat that he completed in 2014 yet which align very closely to *Night*. Finally, the stand-alone piece, *Being Neighbor to Homer* was newly conceived in 2017 and is arguably his most publicly intelligible piece in the exhibition, as it pictures the houses at L’Estaque suffused with a lucid charm, permeating with coruscant, architectural forms of shadow.

The triptych of paraffin and ink on paper titled *Fluid Structures (Phase 13)* made in recent months and another ink on paper, *Fluid Structures (Phase 12)* from last year comprise the extent of art by Sinan Logie at the *Houses at L’Estaque* exhibit. They are framed abstraction at its finest, puzzling dichromatic intrigues that ruminate on the source of modern primitivism and

depart from post-impressionist methods to deconstruct country houses into aspects, qualities, pieces and transformations of visual ideas.

“Where structures are creating differences and categories: Limits; fluids are following the path of continuity between elements, carrying information and linking structures together, to provide them the possibility of change,” Sinan Logie wrote in 2000 during the early days of his *Fluid Structures* project in an essay pinned on the wall at Ariel Sanat, allowing him to remotely justify his exploration of the creative space where matter and energy commingle out of sight.

*Houses at L'Estaque* maintains a tradition that sparked Fauvism and Cubism, as its pioneer Georges Braque, and the later abstract iconoclast Wassily Kandinsky found a peculiar creative regeneration among countless others in the spirit of the land at L'Estaque, a place where Cezanne first captured early modernism in his post-impressionist painting. In the eyes of Selim Birsal and Sinan Logie, the storied landscapes of Provence continue to revolutionize the forms of art and the nature of perception, offering artists, curators and aesthetes revisions of the global architectural landscape with a liberating, universal scope.

November 22, 12:41 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Ceramicist

She held herself with an exquisite poise that spoke volumes of the timeless, creative power of women. The way she sipped her wine-dark tea, how she took soft drags from her constant cigarette, speaking between bouts of laughter with memories of friendship and love, collaboration and invention into her eightieth year for exclusive television interviews. She was one of those rare individuals from the greatest generation who lived with dignity and grace through nearly the entire breadth of the riotous twentieth century. As they saying goes, they simply do not make them anymore.

For as long as history is written, Füreya Koral will be known as the woman who innovated the age-old Turkish craft of ceramics into a global modern art movement. The latest, posthumous retrospective of nearly two hundred of her artworks includes a diverse collection of private and professional documents and photographs. It is a free, public exhibition endearingly titled *Füreya* as she is remembered on a personal, first-name basis. In that way, her legacy is similar to that of Atatürk, who she knew as a close friend. Biographic material is fundamental to the curation by Károly Aliotti, Nilüfer Şaşmazer, and Farah Aksoy, which was on display into late January of 2018. Her life story reads like one woman's humanist account of the nascent Republic of Turkey.

She came of age in many ways, both personally and artistically, together with modern Turkey's inception and rise. Her earliest memories formed during World War I, as Turks shifted allegiances from the sultans and caliphs of the Ottoman dynasty to a secular democracy where women could vote. Despite the fact that the imperial, ancient regime had fallen away, Füreya was a daughter of the Şakir Pasha mansion on the largest of the Prince Islands in the Sea of Marmara from the upper crust of Istanbul. As a young, newly-emancipated and educated Turkish woman, she maintained strong kinship ties with two of her aunts, the renowned engraver Aliye Berger and with Fahrelnissa Zeid, whose art also lives on, most recently in a Tate Modern exhibition and a \$319,500 sale for one of her paintings (then 1.26 million Turkish liras).

Füreya initially studied French while learning the violin with a Hungarian teacher named Karl who would marry her aunt Aliye. In 1928, with diplomas from two prestigious lycées founded by French and Jewish communities in Istanbul, she aspired to become a doctor and practice in Anatolia, but instead followed a career in French education. Six years later, she received an invitation to Europe from one Mrs. Zeid, her aunt who had newly married the prince of Jordan. They formed a special friendship that blossomed creatively in 1945 when she helped with the opening of Zeid's first exhibition inside the sophisticated Ralli Apartment building in the upscale Teşvikiye district of Istanbul.

While assisting her aunt she contracted tuberculosis. Her condition remained dormant for the next year as she wrote music criticism for the Turkish newspaper *Vatan* under her married surname, Füreya Kiliç. By 1947, the disease reared, leading her to a sanatorium in Switzerland for treatment. She passed the time there by taking drawing courses with a Polish artist until her favorite aunts sent some intriguing materials for her to try ceramics. During that life-threatening

spell of hospitalization, she ultimately discovered her lifelong muse. One photograph from that period is emblematic, showing her blissfully carefree in her hospital bed, laughing with a poodle on her lap. The phenomenon of her inspiration runs parallel to the inner evolution of another of the world's most iconic women in art, Frida Kahlo, who was also bedridden when she developed her ingenious creative skill.

Two years following her admission to the sanatorium, she went to Lausanne, where she attended a ceramic workshop. In Paris, one year later, she met French ceramicist Georges Serré, who counseled her with his gifted eye for crafting new patterned forms into stoneware pottery. In the City of Light, she met two important art critics, Jacques Lassaigne and Charles Estienne, who encouraged her to open an exhibition. She made haste and wrote Galerie M.A.I. into history when it showed her first solo exhibition in June 1951, as the Maya Gallery in Istanbul did the same only six months later. From the beginning, she was seen as an artist with an unprecedented touch for blending folkloric and modernist styles. By the time her work appeared in a group exhibition in 1973 she was known in six countries outside of Turkey.

The retrospective, *Füreya* fills an elegant Akaretler building site from top to bottom throughout its coursing labyrinth of rooms and halls within the nineteenth century architectural complex known as the Sıraevler — from the Turkish for the "row houses" — which served as the residences of prime dignitaries in the employ of the Ottoman Empire at Dolmabahçe Palace.

It's a multiparty effort with a range of noteworthy partner organizations like Salt Research, the Ara Güler Archive and Research Center and Lycée Français Notre Dame de Sion, where Füreya studied French in the newborn Turkish republic of the 1920s. The various contiguous, multimedia exhibitions coalesce in points of unison and emphasis with an impressive, narrative scope linking the artist herself and her works with the greater local and global contexts highlighting the significance of her artistic contributions to human creativity from the dawn of time to the contemporary.

Straight through the entrance into the heart of the exhibition, a collection of works hang on the wall from her initial wave of color sketch painting to display her immediate capacity to balance the seriousness of her devotion to craft, with the effective lightness that all great art captures for its often meandering appreciators. And yet, her development was then clearly unripe, lacking the depth and voice that she would become known for passing through fired clay. Scarcely dated, pieces from her black-and-white series from 1951 surfaced from her Turkish subconscious with images of high-domed mosques and Ottoman cemeteries. At the time, Füreya traveled often between Istanbul and Paris struggling with physical ailments, and even checked her ceramic kiln as a baking oven so as not to prompt questions at the border.

One shaped and blazed handful of soil at a time, she went on to sweep her nation before the world with the transformative spirit of modern art. From the traditional collectivism visible in the Hittite pottery of prehistoric Anatolia and the vibrant turquoise glazes in Islamic architecture, she carved and sculpted modernist, individual expressionism out of time to sharpen the



contemporary aesthetic focus. *Füreya* is a triumphant retrospective as it takes the public on a venture through the mind of a woman who painted with the textures of earth and visioned with the heat of the sun. After evolving from her lithographic frames, she became the peerless artist of her renown, mastering such self-styled techniques as reliefs on plates, radiantly paneled murals, which are still exhibited in public spaces, and model houses, among virtually infinite metamorphoses of ideas that she put into practice enough to shape time itself.

In 1991, American scholar of shamanism and psychedelics Terrence McKenna coined the phrase “Archaic Revival” to reconsider the modernist future as a function of prehistory. It is arguably in a kindred direction that Füreya pursued her life's work while resurrecting ancient Anatolian and Mexican motifs. As one among the first generations of modern Turkish women, she brought the defining traditional craft of her country out from the obscurity of mosques and museums to the contemporary light of patisseries and hotels. One of her very early ceramic pieces titled *Fille de la Nuit* is based on the form of the book and reimagines modernism as a cyclical return to creative evolution without precedent.

November 26, 1:04 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Abstracting

In his *Writings on Art*, published in 2006, painter Mark Rothko emphasized repeatedly in the intimate prose he composed from 1934 to 1969 that he gave absolutely no credence to history and criticism with respect to the meaning and effect of his work. His broad, visionary palette of rudimentary schemes were simply the medium for his true art, that being the direct and undivided impact of his canvases on one human heart at a time. He was only interested in the immediate feelings that echoed from creator to observer through the actual, sensual experience of the artwork. The essence of his pieces only emerges in the present, particularly when beheld by appreciative eyes. It is in a kindred sense that the work of Seyhun Topuz appears for her thirteenth solo exhibition, *Present Tense*, to enlighten contemporary art lovers in Istanbul as one of the evergreen elders of abstract sculpture in Turkey.

Topuz has ingeniously opened and formed a rare niche in her native country as a leading creative mind with a special passion for building new ideas. With her unparalleled originality and acute foresight, she has shaped the expression of materialism in her thirty-four years and running as she makes and shows some of the most unconventional of art objects on the global beat. Despite the barrage of questions from intrepid inquisitors who have wandered across the local art maps of Turkey and into Galeri Nev Istanbul since *Present Tense* opened in early November, the gallery's young and eloquent director Lesli Jebahar has remained loyal to the primary vision of the artist.

Galeri Nev Istanbul receives diverse visitors who often arrive puzzled and with varying degrees of exposure to the frontiers of modern culture. The curation of *Present Tense* confidently affirms the absence of narrative in the latest series by Topuz. Prior to *Present Tense*, Galeri Nev Istanbul opened its new space with an exhibition of video installations titled *Beneath the Horizon* by artist İnci Eviner, who had a prestigious retrospective at Istanbul Modern in 2016. It was a welcome return for the artist at the institution that launched her solo career, and yet the curation of projected light was decidedly less site-specific than *Present Tense*. It is clear on entering the exhibition floor at Galeri Nev Istanbul that Topuz brazenly maintains the controversy that has defined modern art since its inception.

Topuz began experimenting with the pair of copper sculptures that she completed in 1984 and titled *Carbon Papers* after returning from New York for the second time. She held her first solo exhibition the year prior at Maçka Art Gallery, the premier contemporary art venue in Turkey for forty years until it closed in 2016 after the retirement of its storied, illustrious director, Rabia Çapa. *Carbon Papers* remained etched in her mind and it has since resurfaced in an expanded form as *Present Tense*. Instantly recognizable as a visual manifestation of crumpled papers, its blatant central image is attested by Topuz. As is clear while walking mindfully through the minimalist decor about Galeri Nev Istanbul exhibition hall, Topuz is equally a master sculptor of the empty space around her work. Similarly, jazz trumpeter Miles Davis reinvented music time and time again by playing to the silence.

Since their move, the showroom inside Galeri Nev Istanbul is now tastefully lit to present static moments of time in the copper sculptures that Topuz contemplated for three decades and finally rereleased with all of her characteristic wit and artistic charm. It has also become an opportunity for the gallery to see inspiration in the potent, clear emptiness of the space and to consider novel directions with its increasingly important historic precedent. The first exhibition curated by Galeri Nev Istanbul in 1987 for the early modern painter, Abidin Dino, stands on common ground with Topuz at the forefront of Turkish art history. The return to an early, formative inspiration with *Present Tense* is a vulnerable, empowering move for the artist to retrace her steps, steadfastly dedicated to her evolutionary, creative self-guidance well into her seventies.

When the 1980 military coup restructured Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, they let Topuz go from her assistant teaching position. She went on to become the self-made independent artist of her distinguished renown as she emerged from her studio and matured beyond academia. Her desire for narrative expression fell away with her trust in the social and political integrities of her nation and its cultural establishment. Beginning around the time when she made *Carbon Papers*, her art has consistently been a telling sign of her determination to represent herself as an individual down to the minutest detail in her work. In that spirit she would sculpt art to reflect nothing more or less substantial than the personal sensibilities that she could impress into the material at hand. What critics and curators define as "abstract" is in many ways simply the evolution of artistic production as it has moved from more marketably political and national contexts and into the direct and full poetic license of the artists themselves throughout the creative process, into the public realm.

With six larger pieces crafted from two contiguous sheets of copper, and five smaller ones made with only a single sheet, Topuz worked with her signature primary color spectrum. Black, white and yellow stand for carbon, copy and note paper, respectively. She fashioned the deceptively simple works in her studio. The material demanded a strong, physical interactivity, as she bent and twisted and played with the stubbornly resistant pliability of the metal. Great effort and at times total exasperation, as endured by the creative mind, is perceivable in *Present Tense*, reflecting the invisible and unfinished aspects in the drama of its making, which are so vital to conceptual breakthroughs. It is inevitably suffered in private among artists who undertake to speak in a natural, authentic voice through artificial transformations of media. Staring at the sculpted metal illusions of crumpled papers, an observer might stretch to see a renewed holism with everything that people tend to throw away toward the regeneration of the prevailing culture, which is habituated to waste as thoughtlessly as the average person might pass a modern art installation with a fleeting glance before looking away, unaffected, if only for a moment in the *Present Tense*.

Topuz had typically always sketched her works before modeling them for sculpture. Unlike the key developments that came before *Present Tense* and its current exploration into her reflexive anachronism of crumpled metal, she was inspired by a completely spontaneous relationship between her artistic technique and the colored copper. By expressing the innate flexibility of her creative self as transcendent and ultimately outside of time, she enacted a cyclical return to an

earlier stage in her growth as an artist. Topuz has crystallized the recurring aesthetic motifs that identify her contribution to contemporary sculpture and abstract art in *Present Tense*. From her *Knots* exhibition, also held at Galeri Nev Istanbul in 2011 as a throwback to forms she first worked on in the 1980s, to *Collective Memory*, a blaring series of basic forms in primary colors that revive childhood playground nostalgia, Topuz turns her public into seers aware that every concept related to time, such as success, age and even memory, is merely a tense abstraction of the all-encompassing moment.

December 3, 5:13 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Afterlife

On any given day, the stairs and ramps leading into Istanbul's American Hospital are busy with the constant flow of the medicalized citizenry who, often injured and mostly anxious, pass by and sometimes enter the adjacent doorway into *Operation Room*, where distinct curatorial designs exhibit new art with a heightened sense of material interdependence. The local fusions of urban society amid the requisite, modern institution surrounding the gallery make for peculiar collaborative inspirations where visual art crosses over into the clinical, scientific realms of human healing. The keenly participatory curator, İlgin Deniz Akseloğlu has directed the space since November 2014, further enlivening the gallery that for the last decade has made its name by testing the line where creative metaphor confronts lived experience.

Despite the seeming limitlessness of its broadly-defined modern expressions, art has maintained its singular reputation for improving health. The activities that span the pure exhibition of total creativity and its appreciation are host to a range of intuitive and personalized metaphysical techniques that have proven benefits. Beyond therapy, art activates a deeper, existential principle which German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer cleverly understood first among many of his intellectual successors as the "will to life." In the hands of holistic thinkers like Julie Upmeyer, art has a mutual tendency to revitalize not only humanity, but also the immanent interrelationships between people, as the self-consciously predominant life form, and the planetary ecology.

During the infamous year of 2016 as the Turkish nation reeled in the wake of multiple historic tragedies, Upmeyer questioned the relevance of her art practice in Turkey, where she had by then called home for ten years. Originally from Detroit, she studied ceramics in Michigan before expatriating to travel throughout Asia and Europe as an artist. Together with Anne Weshinskey, she founded Caravansarai Art Space in Karaköy, where, from 2010 to 2014, they invited local and international artists to the Tan Han building by the waterfront hardware district.

Upmeyer makes a cheerful, energetic impression given to her vagabond soul as she exhales light-hearted genius through impromptu theoretical disquisitions. Every aspect of her work is aglow with the spark of original insight into various transformations of the postmodern materialist paradigm. Largely excavated from the intensive urbanization of Istanbul's ecology, she elucidates with an infectious and undiminished fascination beside her works. The running theme of the current exhibition at *Operation Room*, on display till early December, is to consider the infinite in the finite, and the finite in the infinite. From that concept, she chose *in-finite* as the comprehensive, poetically-charged title.

During her past three summers at home in Istanbul before she became a new mother, Upmeyer would while away her spare time cross-stitching. Only, she did it her way, over custom-ordered industrial floor mats mostly intended as weather-resistant buffers for dirt-caked boots and the like. She saw flowers in them. And with her spectacularly ingenious knack for reinventing industrial material, she animated them as pixelated images. Skillfully composed with a strong,

painterly sense of shadow and color, her series *the flowers* appears for the first time in a public exhibition at Operation Room. In dark greens, blues and grays, a most ephemeral manifestation of nature is rendered through the extremely durable plastic. To simultaneously craft a manual representation of digital photography while transforming the modern elements of hardware in beautiful, aesthetically-inventive floral designs is a stunning achievement.

The next most prolific series at *in-finite* is of five perplexing glass vases filled with various inorganic materials and placed atop a glimmering mirror polished by a highly specialized maintenance staff member from the American Hospital whose sole job is to make sure that every in-house glass surface shines. Upmeyer explained the ideas behind what she calls, *dimensional crisis / undertow* with her personable tact. Her inspiration derived from the inherent complication of creating 3D art in a world in which popular exposure to her work will mainly be consumed through the 2D media of shareable photography. In response, she took up the challenge to contravene apparent dimensional limitations. The series offers remote viewers an experience of three dimensions in two. Looking up from the impeccable reflection, the vases appear filled with vegetation and more diverse color schemes that recall natural abundance below the otherwise monochromatic papers and metals on the surfaces of the vase's contents.

Operation Room typically publishes a fine art book for each exhibition, however, for *in-finite* they opted for a new model. After discussing ideas with Upmeyer, the choice was clear: "Infinity cubes." Only in Turkey, said Upmeyer with a knowing grin, as each of the 1,000 plexiglas cubes are individually enumerated and freely gifted. It's a feature that would likely be impossible for an exhibition to expense within the bounds of more affluent nations. As she attests, Turkish people have a can-do spirit, though with an attitude altogether refreshing beyond the conformist American exceptionalism that dominates with its culturally pervasive egotism. Upmeyer is privy to the welcome comforts of the outwardly foreign, which at times feel more hospitable than what is normally encountered through childhood nostalgia. She never returned to the U.S. after finishing school. Her work as a solo artist has taken her as far afield as Georgia, South Korea, India, Bulgaria, Sweden, Japan, Italy and more and onward as she plans to relocate from her base in Istanbul to Wales in the next year.

It took her nine full days to finish the central piece for *in-finite*. Utterly capturing the aesthetic drive of postmodern sculpture, she exudes the joy of creation while standing beside her piece that she has named *the intruder*. Like an ageless stalagmite in a futuristic cave of waste it sits wedged between the floor and ceiling of Operation Room, bordered by a strip of cheap laminate flooring that she added to mingle effectively with the oppressive, vague austerity of the sterile, hospital ambiance as it leads outdoors. In a tangle of corrugated plastics, insulation foam, paper, tape, bags and other indiscernible components of scrap, *intruder* is the quintessential manifestation of the *in-finite* concept, to visualize the shape and presence of industrial, urban materials that are practically indestructible yet at the forefront of the habitual waste dependency that is as inimical to the greater society as it is unprecedented for all life.

Art writer Ilgin Deniz Akseloğlu chose to show a piece of electro-etching by Upmeyer titled *the shape of the sky 1*. It lucidly objectifies the atmosphere, effecting a powerful dialogue with the ecological scope of *in-finite*. Akseloğlu sees art as integral to a practical understanding of social ecology to reform anthropocentric healthcare. To many scientists, the 12,000 years of geological time known as the Holocene Era has ended. Humanity is poised at the beginning of an age defined by its own devices.

Evidence to identify the contemporary age as Anthropocene gains more traction with each year, recently at the International Geological Congress in 2016 where many experts proved that people have single-handedly and irreversibly altered geological time. From the essential realization that human will united has an undivided influence over creation, the latest generation of contemporary artists are transcending the boundaries of materialism to envision a creative afterlife beyond the often grimly anticipated future.

December 5, 11:30 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Demolition

As a young street artist, Hasan Pehlevan first worked out of his imagination in the timeworn public spheres of Diyarbakır, a notoriously turbulent city in the Anatolian southeast. Surrounded by some of the most significant architectural remnants of UNESCO-enshrined world heritage, his creative roots naturally went very deep, as he confidently sowed his aspirations into the foundations of his hometown where the second-longest complete ancient wall defines the greater historical cityscape. Only the Great Wall of China surpasses Diyarbakır Fortress, built during ancient Roman times.

In his art and his life, Pehlevan remains deeply aware of the relationship that people form with local environments over time. As is endemic to modernity, the temporal construct of an environment is often altered permanently in instants of utter and brutal transformation. He owes certain aesthetic debts to a spectacular range of sources, from French archaeologist Albert Louis Gabriel to Hungarian painter and fellow proponent of op-art Viktor Vasarely, one of the founders of the movement that provokes the idea that visual illusions can influence thought patterns and potentially even change behavior.

The show's patroness, Pırıl Güleşçi Arıkonmaz named Pg Art Gallery after herself when she founded it in 2003, opening in Bebek to introduce much of the world and her beloved country to contemporary Turkish art through participation in international art fairs and by working mainly with established artists based abroad. In the last ten years, the Bosphorus port district of Tophane reconnected Pg Art Gallery with downtown vitality, especially as the neighboring communities of Karaköy and Cihangir took off into the stratospheres of global youth culture with the strength of a third-generation espresso. To celebrate its twenty-fifth year, the gallery will publish a book to highlight its illustrious and noteworthy collections. The bright, personable Esengül Çelik has directed Pg Art Gallery for the last six years with a keen appreciation for socially-engaged work. In the wake of political instability in 2016, the gallery moved only a short walk around the corner from a previously more visible thoroughfare where boatloads of tourists would disembark at the shorefront nearby for a jaunt uphill to the famed Istiklal Avenue. It is a good day now if Pg Art receives up to a hundred passersby. Although it is not comparable to the heydays, the exhibitions are no less responsive to the latest appetites for new art.

For his fourth solo exhibition in Istanbul, Pehlevan titled a collection of his recent works *Formicarium* after the Latin for "ant habitat" as an allegory for modernist housing development. In the subtext of his pieces on display, at Pg Art Gallery until mid-December, the year 1932 is a recurring nexus of contemplation for Pehlevan as it is for his native Diyarbakır. It was during that time when Albert Louis Gabriel placed the relatively obscure academic discipline of archaeology on the popular front of city planning. His simple act of civil disobedience to protect the walls of the Diyarbakır Fortress echoes down the halls of history as emblematic of a moment that spoke for the local people in the name of cultural integrity, and with a force arguably comparable to the urban activism of journalist Jane Jacobs.



In New York City in the 1960s, Jacobs, also a foreign national, preserved culturally-rich downtown neighborhoods with similar tact. Gabriel and Jacobs were up against an intellectual and engineering syndrome that continues to infect cities everywhere. The phenomenon is glaringly unmistakable in the neighborhood of Fikirtepe, a dense collage of skyscrapers on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. It is an apt muse for *Formicarium*, being at the heart of the unfathomably gargantuan urban sprawl that looks as unbelievable in its disorienting immensity as even a rough number of the city's population, then around 14.8 million.

It is a reality that Pehlevan knows intimately in a variety of manifestations, as he witnessed its persistence beyond the early decades of the Turkish Republic as a youth in Diyarbakır and sees it through into the postmodern capitalist frenzy of Istanbul's latest incarnation, rising beyond cloud cover on the Asian horizon. Its easterly direction from the core of the great transcontinental metropolis points to Anatolia, where internally displaced and economic migrants arrive, perpetually in search of opportunity, and in the case of Pehlevan, for a fine arts education. His original aesthetic poses narratives of modernity as bases for collective reflection, and with a thoughtfulness that is dreamlike in its penetrative force, his work explores the essence of op-art, which is less known by its full title as “optical illusion art”, effecting what the French poet Arthur Rimbaud called, “a rational disordering of all the senses.”

Pehlevan innovates painting techniques to have the double illusion of digital art precision while entrancing the eye into enlightening states of selfless absorption. The two canvases at *Formicarium* are visible from the street outside Pg Art Gallery and stretch over the tastefully curated frames for a minimalist touch contrasted with the deceptive complexity of the black-and-white patterns conveying an immovable residential cluster. With his partner, Seval Pehlevan and artist Seçkin Pirim, he produced a pivotal series of mixed-media works integrating epoxy to render a restorative quality to the building materials that he used and preserved in the mutual process of his interventionist art-making. He cleverly executed his concept as a direct interaction with the demolition of the premodern cityscape.

In a documentary video designed collaboratively with photographer Baran Bulut and his longtime friend Deniz Aktaş, who continues to work with the nonprofit, independent art space, *Loading*, in Diyarbakır's rarefied gallery scene, Pehlevan searches through the rubble of the Fikirtepe urban renewal projects that have increasingly blasted the foundations of east Istanbul from 2014 to 2017, and with no foreseeable end. He flips over pieces of concrete and gathers together assemblages of the walls that he painted when the former infrastructure stood amid the amassing groundswell of high-rises on all sides. Bulut and Sedat Akdoğan photographed Pehlevan's artworks before they were recovered from the ruins that made way for a modernist urban planning strategy as formulaic worldwide as it is locally controversial. Brushing geometric intersections of black lines over meticulously patterned strips of tape, Pehlevan crafts op-art with a sharp and refreshing eye, one vital enough to make his Turkish predecessors of the movement proud, such as the late Ismail Altınok.

For a future work in progress, he drew inspiration from a fresco motif in an Armenian church in Diyarbakır that was converted into a mosque. Its fresco was evidently covered over in the process, however Pehlevan managed to give it new life with his talent for optical illusion in paint, as he redesigned the antique aesthetic with an altogether novel quality. The image that he created is as unforgettable as its source material is timeless. In person, Pehlevan has the distinct character of an unassuming genius with his talent for fusing street art and gallery exhibitions with a critical social commentary. As is visible in his art and throughout his creative processes, he has a special weakness for the unseen, the lost and the unrecognized. With an abundant clarity and exacting focus, his work exposes the artifice of history. More, his art awakens the subtle though perceivable uninterruptedness of contemporary life, despite the total, inhuman destruction of the inhabited environment. In his practice, he instills the optimism and courage to look straight through the puzzling pieces of what remains of creation.

December 10, 1:06 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Welcome

Comparing artists is essentially a figurative approach toward the appreciation of new and challenging exhibitions. It is a creative, literary technique to liken separate individuals who have often had little to no connection from the perspective of an outsider speaking in the logical terms of transferable knowledge. The essayistic device of the metaphor highlights artistic originality within the perceivable objectifications of the public imagination.

On the common ground of the modern city, a person alone is practically negligent, especially when they are merely as they are to themselves, unadorned without the social relationships and cultural influences that would proudly define them. When integrated into a movement, a school, an idea, even a belief, anything shared, the individual becomes known and assumes a larger-than-life character. They become symbolic, imbued with collective meaning far greater than that which they would normally ascribe to themselves. An artist is born after assimilating and ultimately transcending the past, when they conceive works that capture the utterly immediate and fleeting present. From that point, they enter the historical process by contributing to its intellectual flux.

And yet, every true artist endures a lifelong and truly universal struggle with the dual natures of authenticity and experience, working in a field in which the source of inspiration is not in the least shareable, and is, as testified by many great innovators, part of an absolutely selfless process of creation. Art has the power to expand minds when it communicates lucidly, and with the vulnerable qualities of the deeply personal, through material that is at once approachable while also breaching the inner walls of emotion and reason.

The paintings of Tarık Töre are simultaneously unprecedented, and neatly encompassed by a range of predecessors whose works now stand to complement the inaugural solo curation of his work. The aesthetic variety and technical craft that he employs displays a radical mind for the charged and nebulous current where precision and revolution meet in the hand of the artist. It is a fine balance, one that Töre executes with the tragicomic wizardry of his youthful brush. His eye is a fountain of youth, evoking tones and contrasts that are as entrancing as they are damnable.

*Whellkom* begins down the spiraling underground steps into the high-ceilinged industrial, loft office at Co-Pilot, a temporary sister space that opened in 2013 as a multi-use venue. Currently, it houses Pilot Gallery during an ongoing renovation to prevent earthquake damage. The avid and wholehearted host, assistant director Amira Arzık is a bright, amiable conversationalist who has witnessed much of the last two decades of the Istanbul art world. On display through late December, the earliest exhibited pieces by Töre are drawn from the darkest interiors of the human soul, as he titled them under his series, *Death*. Overlooking the Pilot Gallery workspaces, a lone rider in neon, electric coral red glows against a moonlit silhouette of mountains. Lit from within like an x-ray, the skeleton of the man and horse is abstracted over a block, as a sculpture would stand in a town square. His subtle illuminations recall the paintings of Miles Davis as his

ingenious mind issued forth in his last years through impromptu tendrils and sweeps of delineated spectrums.

Aside the macabre horseman, he emphasizes his particular talent for opaque sable black of the darkest kind against a glaringly saturated, tawny lime palette. Out of a monolithic rectangle that seems to have been transported from the set of the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, from there the white shades of human bones emerge, here a lower spine, then a ribcage, a skull. The artist's notebook sketches appear with a seeming randomness where the skeleton disappears, his eye sockets covered over with the multicolored lettering *Whellkom* introducing viewers to the ghastly realms of the subconscious where mortal fears take shape.

Downstairs into the nether regions of the exhibition space, the initial piece is made from found material, the fabric of a wedding party meant to be signed by guests. He transformed it into a conceptual remnant of punk graffiti with the simple design of construction bricks sketched over it. Arzık explained his acquired taste for street humor as the bassist for psychedelic surf-rock band *Palmiyeler*. In the hallway leading to the main exhibition space, the final piece from his *Death* series titled *Passage* is a grandiose play on the opposites of the military-industrial complex in confrontation with the idyllic innocence of remote living immersed in nature. Uniformed men from varying world traditions march in an uppity column from the scarred earth of a mining project toward the riverine settlement of a peopled ecological village. Spectacularly distinct, and unforgettable in the exaction of its imagery, *Passage* has all of the antiestablishment satire of fellow Turkish painter of the previous generation, Mevlüt Akyıldız, while conveying a spiritual appetite honed with a visionary symbolism also found in the works of California painter Mark Henson.

In his stream-of-consciousness style excavated from voluminous stashes of personal notebooks, Töre conceived *Mind Puzzle* in 2017 as an oil on canvas with an almost volatile detachment from the status quo. His work spells out liberation one disgusting reality at a time. While his piece lacks the single-minded compositional integrity of the most famous works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, the energy that streams through the autopoiesis of his dream logic has a stunning resemblance to the late, young master of Neo-expressionism. In the paintings of *Whellkom* there are recurring characters, changeling mutants who emerge and disappear from nuclear fallout dystopias and apocalyptic urban agglomerations like wraiths come to signal the end of the beginning. It is a picture meticulously orchestrated with motive stillness in his 2017 piece *The Demonstration*, which revives the glory of cinematic blockbusters in an alternate future that self-destructs with the same pomp and hysteria as the present.

Töre has a keen sense of proportion and its disillusion with respect to the overwhelming ubiquity of advertisements, which regularly sell warped, rescaled images. He is in league with such iconoclastic artists as Claes Oldenburg, who raised the heights of pop-art during its early days in postwar America. *The Demonstration* cleverly reinvents the forms of language as it scrambles intellectual comprehension with the chaotic familiarity of misplaced laughter.

Every piece by Töre is its own universe, an altogether distinct triumph of originality that starts from independent points of creative exploration, though with a certain artistic signature throughout as visible in his thinly penned methods. *Siege (Big Production)* was finished during the weeks leading up to the opening of the show in mid-November as Töre excitedly prepared for his career-defining solo exhibition. It is a powerful revelation of open and closed space in the virtualized contexts of civilization and history. With a style and effect resembling the medieval patron saint of all contemporary visionary artists, Heironymus Bosch, the exhibition gives way to a pair of canvases that evoke the rediscovery of America, where he studied in 2014.

As seen in his utterly expansive landscapes, Töre has a critical intelligence that will develop further to join in such artistic sympathies as with the cutting insights of the Canadian First Nations painter Kent Monkman, whose socially-provocative canvases revise the art history of Manifest Destiny and its ongoing postcolonial legacy with unrelenting wit. Finally, his textured plastic centerpiece resurrects the childlike schemes of Fatih Urunç while unveiling his unique passion for free-form experimentalism.

December 17, 3:56 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Muse

The youth-vibrant Beirut neighborhoods of the Achrafieh district mix where Armenia Street meets Gouraud, one among untold points of intercultural fusion that mark the peoples of Lebanon with an incomparable, post-literate taste for art. Thoroughly steeped in trilingual society as Arabic, French and English are spoken and written in an impressive balance, historic and recent minorities prompt the need for common expression by more universal, visual means. It is likely a similar mindset that led the Phoenicians to develop the first alphabet, an ancestral heritage that remains a source of local Levantine pride. The contemporary art of Beirut is at the forefront of the latest dialogues that are otherwise choked by language barriers.

"Writing is 50 years behind painting," wrote the avant-gardist Brion Gysin in his correspondence with William Burroughs. It led to the collaborative technique to revise literature into a visual art form, a la the "cut-up" method. Burroughs and Gysin were among many who led the still-unfinished postwar zeitgeist with artistic thought when they merged minds with the Arab-speaking world. Following suit in 1970, the renegade Harvard scientist Timothy Leary was busted in Beirut on his way to meet Jean Genet as a fugitive from a prison break in California.

On the evening of December 14, the reputed Epreuve d'Artiste Gallery founder Amal Traboulsi wore a spectacular ensemble for the launch of her book, subtitled, *Chronicle of a Gallery Against a Background of War*. For eleven years during the civil war that raged in Lebanon from 1975-1990, destroying much of Achrafieh, and long after its end, the gallery cultivated national treasure troves of creative talent who survived the tragic bloodshed and destructive horror of domestic, armed conflict. A gregariously Francophone line trailed well outside of the former Sursock family residence for her signing, lit by the stunning nighttime facade of Italianate Renaissance Revival architecture with its classical Ottoman features.

The Greek Orthodox aristocrat Nicholas Ibrahim Sursock left his swanky urban estate to the city of Beirut and to its art lovers after his passing in 1952. In common cause, as to inspire post-literate art for a growing polyglot citizenry, the Sursock Museum held its inaugural exhibition remotely, without walls as the "First Imaginary Museum in the World" before opening at the original mansion in 1961. The vision was clear. The crown of institutional support for creativity in Beirut would transcend cultural bounds, and more, it would free itself from historical convention towards a focus on the unprecedented and emergent.

The Sursocks had climbed upward through the fabulous entanglements of Ottoman high society since the early 18th century before building a mansion in 1912 Beirut that now admits the public freely to appreciate contemporary art. As is obvious from his study, which is intact and on permanent view at the museum, his contacts from Egypt to Ireland exposed him to a fine, liberal education befitting an Ottoman dignitary. In the 1930s, he hosted worldly culturati in his lavish Salon Arabe, a columned divan furnished with Damascene crafts, Ottoman-era Turkish silverware and ornately carved wooden reliefs typical to the Orientalist imagination.

Besides the Salon Arabe, a small exhibition room is showing *Click, Click: The Repetition of Photo-Graphic Subject Matter in the 19th Century* through early February, 2018. Gleaned from the Fouad Debbas Collection of 30,000-plus images from Egypt, the Levant and Turkey, the museum has curated a distinct rediscovery of European perspectives on the exotic locales of old Ottoman territory. With contemporary insight, the entrepreneurial nineteenth century photographs of English, French, American and Italian expeditionaries, evangelists and businessmen are contextualized to reveal pre-modern anachronisms of touristic clichés. While advancing pictorial technology from engraving to film, the early Western photographers to the Orient merely reanimated stereotypes. At the foot of the inconceivable monoliths and the glorious temples of Baalbek, new concepts on point of view, while arguably innovative, were essentially part of a commercialized reproduction process.

Underground at the Sursock Museum, beside the library displaying the archives of the war-resisting Epreuve d'Artiste Gallery, curator Reem Fadda has done certain justice to the Sharjah Biennial for *ACT II*, the last installation for its thirteenth year with her exhibition, *Fruit of Sleep* in continuity with the Biennial's off-site project BAHAR curated by Zeynep Öz throughout Istanbul from May to June. In an homage to Haytham El-Wardany, author of *How to Disappear* (2018), the spectrum of twenty-four multimedia works covers a broad intercalated geography of the subconscious. Its essential metaphor points to a vital reawakening, one desperately needed in a region torn by multiple opposing and intractable realisms. Fadda curates disparate elements with the recurring dream logic of a shrewdly humorous Lewis Carroll narrative.

Beirut-based design studies graduate Tamara Barrage opens the darkened entrance with her specially commissioned 2017 series of gelatinous shapes and textures that are as luminous and amorphous as underwater invertebrates. The main space spreads out with *Mujawara / The Tree School* as a Carob tree is strung up hovering in the center of low wooden chairs. Conceived by the Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) co-founders Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, it is a moveable school complete with a translated textbook relocated from its intervention into the Palestinian refugee camps of Bethlehem and transplanted into a nucleus of the Middle Eastern art world. Behind its circular classroom designed under the immemorial arboreal fixture for ecological pedagogies the world over, Berlin-based painter Dina Khouri effects an industrial fashion statement with her abstractionist oils on steel mesh.

Into the smaller of two side halls about the zigzag atrium, the HD video *Somniculus* (2017) by filmmaker Ali Cherri metamorphoses his chosen settings from the empty gallery spaces across Paris into a subtle motional composite of faces with eyes shut. Recognized in the last two years by Harvard University and the Rockefeller Foundation, he conjures the archaisms of physical anthropology rendered through the reconfiguration of evolutionary time as an inborn revolution of the sleep cycle. Aside its projections, the virtual designs and mixed-media paintings of the U.S.-based Palestinian performance artist and game developer Haytham Ennasr excavate the Phoenician and Roman settlements of Beirut with an eye for futurism through an absorbing, interactive VR headset accompanied by an original cartographic collection in the style of a premature Naive artwork made from multiform documentary explorations.

The more overtly social imports of Palestinian representation come to the fore with the ongoing installation *Ground Truth* by the Forensic Architecture team. In detailed paperwork and lucid footage, the struggle to exist for Bedouin villagers in Israel is given meticulously researched voice and substance. The theme is also pronounced in *Electric Resistance* (2017) by the Sigil collective, spotlighting a powered clandestine field hospital in a raided Damascus suburb. Finally, the postmodern remnants of the "cut-up" method are resurrected by Korean artist Young-hae Chang and American poet Marc Vogue for *The Art of Sleep*. Initially commissioned by the Tate Museum, it is a romp of 20th century cultural references fired in the contemporary technological kiln of somnambulant visions. Its declarations, that art is absolutely everything, works wonders in contrast to the Sursock Museum environs where the uppish beau monde from the Paris of the East set the stage for the trends of contemporary art to thrive in Beirut.

December 20, 11:37 PM  
Beirut, Lebanon



## Underworld

The stylish and historic European port neighborhood of Karaköy is a hyper-local front up against the encroaching horrors of the gentrification that consumes and wastes all forms of life overnight with the spike of a third-wave coffee. Its few, vine-terraced streets are studded with overpriced bars, high-end cafes and world cuisine. Where the labyrinthine maze of its haunts begin in Kemankeş quarter around the corner from the sixteenth-century *hamams* (Turkish baths) of the Kılıç Ali Pasha Complex, the spare, warehouse space of Sanatorium Gallery offers passersby a window into the earthly underworld of post-naturalist art with *Nature Morte*, a solo exhibition by Ali Ibrahim Öcal.

Founded in 2009 as an art initiative by eight artists, the current doors to Sanatorium opened in September of 2011, curating solo and group shows with an eclectic crew of locals and foreigners, sharpening the creative edge of inner-city designs, cultivated in the decadent and expanding megalopolis that defines contemporary Istanbul. Its walls and corners, floors and lights, nooks and ceilings are grounds for the open and illuminated public dismemberment of the artistic process, as the gallery especially looks for developing bodies of work by artists who are unafraid to expose the rawness of unfinished and experimental visions. For the *Nature Morte* show, independent curator Necmi Sönmez instills a vibrant, piercing continuity in line with the source inspiration from the seven pieces on display.

Walking through the storefront entranceway, the industrial concrete environs crack and split in hissing shots of powdered stone. Taxis cram through the narrow cobble, grazing the jackets and shoes of ubiquitous pedestrians who stroll into the hipster disarray, where antique dealers and graffiti artists rub shoulders over the caffeinated glories of impromptu, postmodern urban communities. There are some five art galleries on the single alleyway corner by Sanatorium as the city trembles to overflowing with an intoxicating blend of creative juice that never ceases to fire the imaginations of globetrotters and nationals alike. Born in Germany and educated in Turkey, the fourth solo exhibition by Öcal integrates the greater horizon of local art.

*Nature Morte* refines and advances the concepts and practices of EcoArt with a powerful eye for extracting the phenomenal qualities of the earth from the normalized, mundane perceptions of everyday existence. As the legendary declaration by Nietzsche that “God is dead,” the current exhibition at Sanatorium delivers a paradigm-shifting decentralization of daily life from the habitual monotonies of behaviors and thoughts. While drawing from natural materials like leaves, thorns and branches, Öcal does not succumb to what Shakespeare called the “wasteful and ridiculous excess” crystallized in his classic phrase, “to paint the lily” from his 1595 play *King John*. Instead, the pieces that comprise *Nature Morte* rise from the anthropocentric perspective of the post-industrial and unsustainable world of global cities.

The epoxy resin that shapes and petrifies the overlapping, reserved magnolia leaves for the 227-centimeter-wide *May-August Magnolia Scale* (2017) gives the piece an apt aesthetic uniformity, as pressed into the forged earth of metallic buildings and pixel-distracted eyes. Bronzed and

gleaming in subdued, muted reflections, the shape of the leaves almost disappear, forming an abstraction of hues that darkens toward the floor. With a closer look the spines and veins of leaves come through. And although flattened, the textural integrity of the plant fibers are retained. It breathes with the quality of a painting. When seen as a unity, it is a shock of distinct colors. In detail, certain techniques are exposed, like brush strokes, only in the placement of each leaf, blatantly dead and dry, fractured and cut.

Aside it, *Skin of Sea - III* (2017) makes waves, frozen in a paralysis of crested lines. Its roughly applied oil on a 250-centimeter-wide canvas evokes the effects of surface water with a masterful, post-realist impressionism that stings in its fine execution. Against the bare, white background wall, there is a dynamic lifelessness to its indulgent, action-paint style. In three tones of grey, it is reminiscent of Monet and Pollock. Inside a curious, narrow hall within the modest gallery space, the bronze sculpture *Rosebud* (2017) is presented with a lofty air under soft yellow lights, upheld and free-floating on a stand. Its slender figure in the manifestation of an artificial thorn branch appears almost holy in a dedicated space practically enshrined with its careful curation, as could befit the invaluable heirloom scepter of a prehistoric sun king. With his peculiar bent for deeply original, post-naturalist trends, his sculptural work homes in on the theme of natural death with a revivalist disposition.

*Three Loops for Lephitos* (2017) is the sole video installation of *Nature Morte*, concentrated over the torso of what looks like a horse, it realizes the subtle and sinuous, pulsing and muscle-toned skin of a strong and healthy, living animal. The taut, ribbed belly of the being is cut to frame, compartmentalized into the viewable standard of a moving image. That a creature of nature is reduced to size, and rendered into a fragmented abstraction through the narrow lens of the human perspective captures a microcosmic point relating the entire construction of the deadly anthropocentrism that turns the naturally abundant earth into an intellectual exercise in real-time planetary ecocide. It speaks to the ancient Indian parable of the "Blind Men and the Elephant," specifically in the first, blind impression of the elephant as a wall, ultimately contributing to the overall truth that no one fully grasps nature because they will only know a part of it, and finally, are of it themselves. As the late philosopher Alan Watts repeatedly explained with comic clarity, such an assumption is tantamount to the old saying: Pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps.

*Burnt Forest* (2017) is a 270-centimeter-long triptych conceived from aluminum epoxy resin in the configuration of pleated plastic forming rivulets, valleys and gorges of wrinkles enough to emerge into view like the sight of an aerial landscape. It epitomizes the notion of an earthly underworld, as the monochromatic realm is proportioned like the two-dimensional map of a theoretical planet reformatted into rectangles and set with computer precision. *Hand Knows - Cosmos II* (2017) is, visually speaking, the most impressive piece at *Nature Morte* considering the meticulous consistency of its design. Delicately crafted with individualized thorns decontextualized over a slab of aluminum and patterned to a swirling, galactic effect, it has the characteristic ingenuity of a Tibetan sand painting, though with a rustic quality that is conspicuously the result of one mind rather than that of a collective religious aesthetic.

Finally, in terms of pure novelty of invention, the flagship piece at *Nature Morte* is the *Untitled* (2017) installation in the form of nineteen tree branches, each fitted handle-free with the spade end of shovels. Contiguously stretching upward in a wild tangle of arboreal tendrils, it bears the post-naturalist aesthetic incarnate. More, the work has the force of a blunt statement questioning the anthropocentric utilitarianism of nature. A tree is not merely intended for human use, as to facilitate the digging of its rooted earth. Öcal, in his strikingly macabre images and understated artistic intelligence, is showing that when people force the earth to torture itself they are raising the underworld and its plucked leaves, its dead seas, its preserved limbs, its burned forests, and its cut thorns all the way to the over-civilized high ground beyond the pale of natural life toward artistic resurrection from a most natural death.

December 27, 10:47 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

**2018**

## Eyes

The burly mug of Churchill on the wartime front, the hardened visage of Hemingway in his Cuban refuge and the timeless face of Einstein from his Princeton days are among the countless historic luminaries whose portraits have been immortalized with poetic justice under the studious eye of Yousuf Karsh. In silvery shades of black and white, his distinctive photographs convey the penetrating stares and lines of character that have shaped the personalities and impressions of great twentieth century world leaders. From the most introspective artists to the freest revolutionaries, a soundless, though blaring call to universal humanism shines through the celluloid prints that bear his ingenious signature aesthetic.

In 1976, Yousuf Karsh photographed Kenojuak Ashevak, an Inuit artist who rose to international fame not long after the first indigenous artist cooperatives cropped up around Cape Dorset and the high Canadian north. Described as a "tiny lady" by the photographer's wife Estrellita Karsh, who took special interest in Inuit culture, Ashevak steered her gaze away from the lens with a reserved poise, clasping her hands together as they disappear under the fur-lined cuffs of her traditional Arctic garb. Her work is at the forefront of the exhibition *Follow the North Star* on display at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston, the city where the young and ambitious Yousuf Karsh began as an apprentice photographer to John Garo in the late 1920s. Its lead piece is a mythopoetic self-portrait that Ashevak created to reimagine herself in the incarnation of a curiously familiar, wide-eyed owl. It is her stone-cut and stencil *Summer Owl* (1975), which she made at the West Baffin Eskimo Co-op in Nunavut.

After nearly four decades residing in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, where Yousuf Karsh found his most enduring sense of home alongside Estrellita, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario began outreach services to Nunavut in 1998, a year before the region became its own territory. Inuktitut is the official language for some fifteen thousand local children who make up almost half of the population. Within the opulent maze of priceless MFA curations, *Follow the North Star* welcomes its host culture in Inuktitut within the neoclassical Gothic Revival building on the Avenue of the Arts in the core of Boston's historic downtown districts. The twenty four pieces from the Karsh collection that comprise the exhibition are suffused with the immemorial qualities of Inuit art, beautifully preserving time-honored cultural motifs that emerge into light with an innocent magic. The rudimentary colors and earthy techniques in the works appear as if out of the dream of a lost and blessed child alone with the spirit of nature, sharing in the mystic bliss of living, mutable creation.

With spiritualized ecological sentiments of the ageless Inuit aesthetic well-envisioned in the stone-cut piece, *Journey through a Dream* (1973) by Lucy Qinnuayuak, picturing a diverse group of giant birds as they lead a weary sailboat team behind a lone shaman kayaker safely to shore. Such lithographic, geologically-driven mediums printed from the rare and sacred rock of the permafrost-covered Arctic facilitate the minimalist, supernatural edge that is essential to carving out what the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell professed as the concept of "elementary ideas" first proposed by the father of American anthropology, Adolf Bastian. In the scholarship

that culminated only after thorough and inspired exposure to Inuit art, among other aesthetic crafts by a range of indigenous people spanning the planet, the literature that Campbell and Bastian advanced for such successors as the ethnographer Franz Boas and later the sculptor James Houston identifies key psychological components that discern individuality and collectivism in human expression. That creative tension is crucial to an appreciation of Inuit art where its folk elements bridge strong stylistic and technical commonalities between artists and communities.

Inuit art remains confidently seated in its peculiar, localized movements of folkloric and mythic contemporary art, honed with the intensively disciplinarian traditionalism born of harsh northern survivalism. Each brilliantly collected and tastefully curated piece in the *Follow the North Star* exhibition reveals the infinite enigma of artistic novelty and its recurring power as a force of metamorphosis capable of altering linearity and rationalism toward the opening of a mind for cyclicity and the paranormal. Uniquely cultivated, creative talents from the Arctic have never ceased grasping for the emptiness within where new potential inspires dedicated seers to become visionaries and finally artists. These individuals by virtue of entertaining the polar muses speak in the natural language of that superhuman environment, in the transmogrifying shapes of its lands and skies, and the ebullient enchantments of its animals and spirits.

Yousuf Karsh returned to the Arctic in 1979 to photograph Jessie Oonark, a self-styled Inuit witch from the Sanavik Co-op on Baker Lake in Nunavut. Her pursed lips, tightly etched face and dark, burning pupils enlighten the gelatin silver print of the film developed by Karsh, a man who traveled to the eternal heart of his time with a camera, sculpting stills from the shadows of his masterful direction of poses. And through his eye, she conveyed volumes and lifetimes of tales without the slightest twitch of her tongue. Her piece in *Follow the North Star* is a stencil titled *Pipe Dreams* made during the last year of her life in 1985. Its mind-bending, hallucinatory subject is a naive, prototypical op-art anthropomorphization of a merman inhaling from a pipe. In poetic inscriptions published with the exhibition, Estrellita demonstrates her intimate knowledge of the Inuit world with her astute appreciation for the role of the shaman, the ritual healer in Inuit societies, and the recurring symbolism of human-to-animal transformations as prompted by the absorption of a holy substance into the body.

The forays that Yousuf and Estrellita Karsh explored in the otherworldly realms of Inuit art represented the latest years in the working life of the photographer. In North America, he came to redefine modern portraiture. The year he photographed Jessie Oonark, he was better known for his work with Pope John Paul II and Andy Warhol. He had traveled to remote locales before to meet Georgia O'Keefe at her legendary desert recluse, to lean in close to capture the stress wrinkles of Fidel Castro and to evoke a candid moment of ease with King Faisal. It was in the painted visions of his Inuit countrymen and women of Canada where he refreshed his Armenian eyes and saw into the passion of his illiterate father, his educated mother and his family.

Despite the ongoing controversies related to the origin story of his ethnic territory, he lived his illustrious life as a proud Armenian. In later years, while often contemplating his maiden

disembarkation as a teenage immigrant on the Atlantic coast, he never lost sight of his mentor John Garo who introduced him to the MFA in Boston, a place that would become a perennial resource for his work and influence. He taught Karsh to observe the subjects of his portraits with an acute eye and to use his faculty of memory as an integral part of his craft. In a similar light, Estrellita Karsh commemorated one hundred and fifty years of the Canadian Confederation with *Follow the North Star* to rekindle the undying flame of creative reflection that Yousuf Karsh lit in Boston during his earliest years as an aspiring portraitist.

January 4, 5:20 AM  
Boston, USA

## Mecca

The transliterated Arabic name for Makkah entered popular English usage as a secular locale, where people generally accumulate in great numbers by the year 1843, a decade before Sir Richard Francis Burton disguised himself as a Muslim pilgrim and became one of a handful of outsiders to ever see the holiest city in Islam. Although Christian, he went twice to finally bear witness to the sacred Kaaba. His book, *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*, published in 1855, was a Victorian sensation and remains a classic.

In 1680, when Joseph Pitts became the first Englishman to perform Hajj, he was by then a forcibly converted slave to Algerian pirates. His highly poetic and finely observed account is remarkably sunnier, as he won his freedom in Makkah. In the eyes and footsteps of Orientalist historians, the allure of the forbidden reigns in the heart of the professedly advanced, postmodern West as it is continually driven by the spoils of its unsurpassed geopolitical reach. When such narratives are retold from the source, through mixed media, and especially by locals from within the foreign cultures that are fantasized to perennial intrigue, opposites shift. The unfamiliar becomes familiar, and the ordinary is suddenly and abruptly unrecognizable.

By the 1980s, the Saudi government replaced the official Latinized spelling of Mecca to Makkah in reference to its full title, *Makkah al-Mukarramah* — meaning "Makkah the Honored" in Arabic — over controversies surrounding inappropriate use. For his exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, *Mecca Journeys*, the Saudi artist Ahmed Mater returned to one of the earliest place names of the city with his 2016 book *Desert of Pharan: Unofficial Histories Behind the Mass Expansion of Mecca*, a collection of over five hundred photographs, along with writings and interviews. Presented exclusively for perusal in the exhibition space at the museum, the thick publication inspired the prodigious curation of photography, video and sculpture that he produced for nearly the past decade. With his historic designation, he recovers an ancient Semitic term from the Old Testament for the mountain wilderness of Makkah.

Mater begins with a *hadith*, a saying from Prophet Muhammad, and one that is frequently memorized by Muslims and scholars, though not for its spiritual munificence, but for the harsh truth of its foresight. It reads, as translated from the Arabic: "You will see the barefooted, scantily-clothed, destitute shepherds competing in constructing tall buildings." That is the pith of his *Mecca Journeys*, a multifaceted and magnified, reflexive perspective on the distended modernization of the utterly earth-bound holy city from the ground up to the crescent moon.

Advancing through the snow-swept colonnade of pillars under the immense glorification of its Beaux-Arts architecture, the Brooklyn Museum is a spacious labyrinth of masterworks befitting its world-class stature. On the fourth floor, the works of Mater are displayed with expansive lucidity under high ceilings and atrium balustrades a short walk from the animal mummies of the Pharaohs and the first epic of feminist artwork by Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (1979).



In terse descriptions excerpted from the *Desert of Pharan* and curated next to each oversized print conveying the gargantuan scales of his subjects, Mater writes thoughtful and heartfelt prose, often drawing from his childhood memories and family stories. Makkah is home to an altogether unique composite of globalized humanity.

The hallowed ground has ever been a crossroads, forming bridges and sometimes walls between contested geographies, while serving as the epicenter that preserves a major alternative to the diversely kept ages, calendars and records of historically defined cultures. By traveling — which, to many in Makkah, is synonymous with pilgrimage — a greater understanding of epochal time is clearly revealed in relation to place.

Mater writes, "The symbolic city is replacing the real city," with the introductory photo to the exhibit, a chromogenic print titled, *Foundation for the New Tower (2015/2017)*, considering the massive influx of new refugees, immigrants, workers, tourists and businessmen who have endured the audacious urbanization that he has seen materialize within his lifetime.

*Mecca Journeys* is not necessarily about the Makkah of Islam as much as it is about the daily transformation of its superficialities and near-total unearthing. Many of his foregrounds are stunning portraits, spotlighting the faces of the men who work literally on the edge of the other side of high-rise building contracts and real estate investiture. Post-immigrant America, the rise and fall of Communism, international refugee crises and the global financial infrastructure detail the value and consequence of human movement as politicized and priced down to the individual.

Contrary to the prevalence of secondhand opinion on matters concerning Islamic civilization, Makkah is not immune to modernity despite its sanctions against non-Muslim travel, a fact that Mater addresses with a powerful gaze in his two-channel videos *Road to Mecca I & II (2017)* captivatingly interwoven with pre-modern scenes from the city before swaying camels and slow caravans were replaced with stuffed minivans and jammed highways.

In his artist statement, Mater explains with authoritative insight how Makkah is, in many ways, no different than any other global city. It is only its special historical and religious symbolism that sets it apart. In between demolitions and constructions, *Mecca Journeys* captures and unravels the historical process towards an illumination of its truly timeless nucleus that continually receives the highest dedications to spiritual meaning for about one and a half billion people. Educated in the holistic disciplines of community medicine, Mater boils down his critical, artistic observations to one word: denial. Makkah is not only the destination for pilgrims. It is an inhabited, modern city. From that subtle, though basic point, *Mecca Journeys* speaks through the eyes of local residents and generations of pilgrims as they watch the lives and histories they have made disappear in the blink of a signature.

Raised in Abha near the Yemeni border, Mater first pilgrimed to Makkah as a child and later returned as an adult while practicing medicine and art, as he searched for a means to harmonize his callings. He found what he was looking for on the road from Jeddah to Makkah, where he has since evoked his firsthand knowledge with the fine skill of his camera as he muses on the nature of pilgrimage. The timeworn philosophical maxim that emphasizes the importance of the journey over the destination is often attributed to the American essayist and Transcendentalist thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was notably influenced by Islamic literature. While the means of transportation to Makkah once changed for pilgrims in the past, current economic and technological paradigm shifts in Saudi Arabia are redefining the core experience of arrival that every faithful Muslim seeks for soul fulfillment.

*The Road to Mecca I* loops to thrash metal as billboards fly by McDonalds and checkpoints differentiating Muslims from non-Muslims, all shot through the blurred and constant lens of Mater who films from roadways increasingly packed with traffic. By night, on *The Road to Mecca II* police lights oscillate drowned in a shoulder-to-shoulder mass march swelling beyond the frame to the jarring, primal music of Arabian folk drummers. Downwind through the museum hall studded with the majestic vistas of the Royal Clock Tower complex overlooking the Kaaba and the Grand Mosque, a piece made with a pair of magnets and iron fillings is titled *Magnetism* (2012) as the first of two sculptural works from *Mecca Journeys*. Its visceral metaphor depicts the allure of the Kaaba as a spiritual place in the eye of the storm of the world.

January 11, 4:07 AM  
Brooklyn, USA

## Forbidden

The exquisitely dressed Turkish intellectual Hasan Bülent Kahraman strolled through the hotly-celebrated bounty of visual arts venues in the storied Chelsea District of Manhattan in the spring of 2016 and was expressly awestruck by an exhibition at the Danese/Corey gallery titled *Hinterland*. Its solo artist, Susie MacMurray was then showing a series of mixed-media sculptures with a pair of ink drawings themed to a classic philosophical dualism, musing on the prehistoric and mythopoetic subconscious. Her works, including core pieces *Medusa* (2014-15) and *Pandora* (2016) were soon commissioned to appear in Istanbul.

Under one of his many hats as fine arts curator, Kahraman speaks and writes with the authority of the distinguished author and professor that he is, comfortably conversant as a thinker whose piercingly original, analytical range covers some of the most challenging sociopolitical dialogues around the world. And particularly when pontificating astutely to abandon about artworks by Susie MacMurray, his cognitive focus extends from time immemorial to ancient subjects befitting his scholarly prestige as an academic, journalist, columnist and department head of Communication Design at Kadir Has University.

Inside the brilliantly spacious, and finely lit ground and second floors at the Akbank Sanat Gallery on İstiklal Avenue, within the throbbing heart of downtown culture and commerce near the European shores of the Bosphorus, he has carefully rearranged new and recent works from Susie MacMurray with the finesse of a composer reimagining new music.

In his careful prose, he outlines his curatorial judgment through kindred thought processes instigated by the artist. Together, they deftly reconsider the predominant religious belief of the Logos, that being the emergence of language as the prime inspiration for universal creativity. With many pieces evoking more modernist aesthetic affinities, the eighteen works for *Strange Fruit* assert that art precedes the word, capturing the essence of the archetypal imagination through a feminist interrogation with the greater narratives of human identity that all cultures hold as the sacred images of themselves.

"I saw her works and immediately fell in love. I was looking for something which was inherent in Susie's works. Contemporary art mostly concentrates on the theoretical and political which I value very much as a theoretician myself. I think about difficult problems and I find so many openings when the artists start to re-conceptualize or interpret that specific concept," said Kahraman, leading an exclusive press show on a lecture tour of *Strange Fruit* on the evening before its opening to the public.

When I saw the works I realized once again that they have a very deep, theoretical, psychoanalytical, feminist dimension. Nevertheless, these layers of the work would never go before aesthetic, lyrical, poetic side of the works. I think this exhibition combines both.

A curious contingent of art enthusiasts, young and old, joined Kahraman to peer more closely into such sculptures as the title piece, *Strange Fruit* (2017), made with reclaimed military barbed wire and silk velvet. Curated with an intensive, solitary focus within the stark emptiness and playful shadows of the expansive room inside Akbank Sanat, its textural juxtaposition contrasting rusted razors with the plush fabric epitomizes the underlying sentiments of the artist.

In person, Susie MacMurray is delightfully approachable, as she beams with effervescent delight for the sheer amount of area that her works have to breathe inside one of Istanbul's flagship privatized arts institutions. To her, *Strange Fruit* speaks to the essential reality of the human condition. On the one hand, every individual is desperately vulnerable, seemingly from all directions, and especially from within. While at the same time, people survive to planetary predominance despite reckless infighting and harsh climates.

As a woman of extraordinarily sound mind, and exuding a palpable soul surrounded by the charged, fascinating complexity of her newly displayed art, MacMurray reflects on her last twenty years since she first saw Istanbul with a simple, honest brevity as she generously shares one conversation after the next with each new pair of passing eyes and open ears. Appearing as one who has lived again, resurrected from the depths of a tragic past, she is brightly open about the death of her husband John MacMurray, the late principal trumpeter for The Hallé orchestra who made music and a family with MacMurray before she became a globetrotting visual artist with multiple solo exhibitions behind her.

As a proud interventionist, she has staged shows at the Pallant House in Chichester and the medieval York St. Mary's Church as part of her work to transform the high-society estates and religious foundations of the prevailing establishment into new mediums through which to express contemporary, living art.

A pensive walk through *Strange Fruit* has the effect of wandering into the original meaning of a museum as the house of the muses, only from an ancient future, one furnished with homages to the goddess cults of early antiquity. *Medusa* is a powerfully impressive restoration of the archaic revival as espoused by the seers of modernity who envisioned cultural advance into time as cyclical, encompassing preliterate humanity. Meticulously crafted with handmade copper chain mail over fiberglass and steel armature, MacMurray explains her source material in the famed, upturned medusa heads of Istanbul's enigmatic Basilica Cistern whose origins are unknown and that perpetually attract amateur photographs from across the planet to march underground into the Byzantine complex built during the sixth century.

When she began to embark on a career as an artist after completing an MA in Fine Art in 2001, she initially tried her hand at drawing, and then soon found her calling in contemporary sculpture. As she reminisces with a candid ease, it was out of a need to work more viscerally, with objects and materials that she could hold, transform and construct.

Entering the ground floor at Akbank Sanat, two of her earlier works among the more recent pieces curated for *Strange Fruit* festoon the walls in tightly arrayed circular forms repurposed from plucked fowl. *After Flock* (2011) and *Decoy* (2012) are made with dyed turkey feathers and goldside pheasant feathers respectively, and both over convex polystyrene. Complementing the prehistoric cultural modality with *Medusa* they unearth the feather headdresses worn by the matriarchal goddess-worshipping civilizations that once roamed the European continent in the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, from the Minoans of Crete to the Celts of Britain.

It is uniquely convenient for contemporary feminists that there is a significant body of scientific research to prove that goddess cultures appeared before the expression of male deities in the prehistorical record. The literally groundbreaking twentieth-century Lithuanian linguistic archaeologist Marija Gimbutas made it her life's work to strengthen her findings which supported this revisionist understanding in line with archaeological excavations. Although controversial, she was roundly esteemed by her peers in the U.S., notably among them was the prolific mythologist Joseph Campbell.

As a more intimate excavation of her personal history, MacMurray fashioned the symbol of the wing beyond the spectacularly nuanced flight of her feathered designs for *Requiem* (2015). It is the most immediate of two works on the second floor of Akbank Sanat that employ materials gleaned from a symphony orchestra. *Requiem* is made, as exactly described on its curated placard, with "used violin and cello strings threaded onto used piano strings donated by professional musicians." In *Pandora* (2016) the recurrent metaphor is clear, fashioned with clear cast resin bullets on a lightbox, it is a figment of total human vulnerability, sharply observed.

January 13, 11:18 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Optical

Across the street from Ayvansaray University, the Golden Horn shorefront hospital Balat Or-Ahayim opened as a dispensary built by the local Jewish community in 1885. Named after the Hebrew for *Light of Life*, it remains a landmark in the neighborhood as inhabitants and travelers reminisce nostalgic of the late Ottoman era when Jews made up the majority in many districts up and down the Bosphorus and its storied inlet where they had lived for ages, immemorial to most, measured by ancient exile among the learned.

Residents historically serviced by Or-Ahayim were Jewish, though they were also workers from the area, making up a generally impoverished class order that continues to fix the welfares of people who live in the environs of the modern hospital as they emerge from the substandard infrastructure that hangs conspicuously from the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.

Walking along the edge of the pavement that cuts off against the waters of the Golden Horn, moored rental yachts and decrepit boats disintegrate into a dazzling array of molded rust and peeled paint, kitschy lighting and ceremonial facades. Ongoing construction efforts to revitalize it as an attractive boardwalk have left the old Jewish hospital as one among a rare handful of historic buildings left for intrepid minds to connect the dots of time as they converge and scatter across the transcendent and intricate cityscapes of Istanbul.

The lights are on at the gate to Ayvansaray University, as its students gather over glaring smartphone chats, smiling upward into the evening beyond, growing all the dimmer once stepping off campus. Friendly security officers turn a switch and the electric turnstiles open automatically into an enlightened space. As is true the world over, universities are the gleaming cores of social fruition, islands of cultural optimism, where the forms of civilization are safely broken down and rearranged to inspire intellectual liberation. Emblazoned in white lettering on a street sign within the walled confines, Plato Sanat gallery is only a few steps from the entrance.

Immediately visible at first look inside the bright, simple gallery space, an inventive channeling of street graffiti is deftly manipulated by Hasan Pehlevan, a man at large under cover of night with a strong tag and a bottle of paint. To add to the group show of eight artists at Plato Sanat, he uncovers the techniques of his ingenious signature design with his 715-centimeter-long mural work *Pattern* (2017), which he threads through his current work like the subtext of a new and provocative aesthetic philosophy. Its visual rendering springs with images of tangled wiring surfacing from illusive holes in the wall, and simultaneously it is a pair of swinging bells.

His manifest ideas are steeped in the prompt to remake the world from the remnants of it that were destroyed in untimely ways. As such, Pehlevan's next work for the *Op Not Pop* group show at Plato Sanat is *Broken Minaret* (2017). Its concept is based on his experience with found materials in his native Diyarbakir where he recovered fragments of a fresco from an old Armenian church.

*Op Not Pop* is the clever rebranding of a pair of art movements that while in many ways related are quite distinct. Op Art gained traction in Turkey from its early adherent, the twentieth century painter İsmail Altınok, whose works continue to enjoy posthumous appreciation in art galleries in downtown Istanbul. In a few words, Pop Art is salable, and its prestige is won either by its price, or through its effectively speaking to the merging of creativity and advertising in the popular cultures and mass media of capitalist societies. Andy Warhol, who is synonymous with the rise of the movement, famously represented one of the cheapest items at the grocery store, a can of soup, and turned its image into a work of art, by that meaning it became, in effect, priceless. If one of the chief intentions of art is to reflect society and cause even its stubbornest minds to expand despite the deafening and drowning flood of consumer norms, then Warhol achieved that with eye-catching gravity.

Op Art, on the other hand, does something entirely different to the eye. It doesn't merely grab the retina and send messages into its brain to configure values and figures. Op Art conjures the effect of hallucination. It is the art of illusion. In terms of dualist thought, there could be said to be essentially two kinds of artists. The first acts like a mirror. They merely depict what is seen objectively, perhaps through an impressionist lens, or a naturalist one. The other works from the inside, recreating the substance or idea of their concern, subjectively. Pop Art could be said to fit into the first category, and Op Art in the second.

For his exhibition notes, Marcus Graf, the curator of *Op Not Pop* wrote: "The artists at the show are interested in formalist ideas as well as in using strategies of Op Art for critically discussing the character of our mediated and manipulated reality."

In that way, whereas Pop Art tends to amplify capitalist demand, whereas Op Art is an introspective questioning of its aesthetic principles in the interest of mental reformation. Graf pieced together *Op Not Pop* with a disciplined vision, grouping the variety of works and artists into spatial designations of a certain creative focus. The eight-piece polyptych, also integrating a mural *Untitled* (2015-2016) by Eser Tuncer, and the oil on canvas *Schloss Balmoral - Colorful* by Ekrem Yalçındağ, both employ repetitive, illusive patterns in like-minded fashions, with the work by Yalçındağ conveying more precision overall, leading to the digital prints and two-channel video installation by Ömer Pekin. Inside a darkroom, behind an opaque curtain, a 50-second video by Pekin ventures through the psychological landscapes of the digital era, its sleek paradigms threadbare with ones and zeroes before degrading into basic lines and rectangles of the computerized imagination.

In an effort to craft the effect of technology on the eye, artists like Seçkin Pirim at *Op Not Pop* have taken extreme, painstaking measures. Made with one hundred and sixty pieces of 300-gram Bristol paper cutouts, his piece *On the Road* (2017) freezes the wavelength into a seismic geology of forms, expanding on the emergence of texture. Graf curated the open-ended rooms at Plato Sanat with a steadfast eye for recurring visual themes. Alongside the work of Pirim are sculptural affinities in the polyurethane creations of Ebru Döşekçi whose piece *Shine* (2017) is a surprising experiment in perspective, as it demands a second glance from viewers who see it

head on only to realize that from above a light casts through it to produce shadows in the letters of its title. One of the especially alluring pieces at the exhibition is *Untitled* (2016) another work by Seçkin Pirim, stunning in its sheer intensification of detail. His vision is comparable to the art of Alex Grey, particularly his Cosmic Mirrors series with respect to capturing a spiritualized anatomical peregrination from physical body to soul essence.

Ayvansaray University houses Plato Sanat with a host of contemporary spaces for new ways of thinking to find a voice and an ear within an intellectual respite safe from the cataclysmic buzz of the greater city. Around its corner, such fifteenth-century edifices as the Jabir Mosque shelters devotees to a man who narrated Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, firsthand, so the stories go, as he was his companion in seventh century Arabia. One *hadith* is written on the side of the mosque: "One day Constantinople will be conquered. How beautiful its conquerors."

January 17, 11:43 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Primitivism

The artist focuses on the minutest of spaces, in the slightest fractions of time, and through those realms that border on pure introspection, they manifest grand expanses and figments of timelessness that are able to reach into the heart of any unsuspecting individual and grab at the pulsing veins of their humanity. Whether it is the impressions of lettered ink on a page or the brushes of a painted palette on a canvas, the creative mind gravitates to the microcosms of reality in search of metaphors that open to the ends of the unknown multiverse. It is under that subtle though penetrating light where such artists as Aylin Zaptçioğlu find surety, grace, and with at least a few strokes of luck, enough to deepen the visual narrative that is passed down through the generations to only the worthiest of skilled successors.

After cutting her teeth in the shallow pool of those green and often yellow artists who are truly distinguished from the groundswells of the up-and-coming as a 2008 graduate of Mimar Sinan University, the most prestigious fine arts school in the country, Aylin Zaptçioğlu experienced new depth in her relationship with her professor and mentor, Neşe Erdok, a strong and masterful woman known for her innovations in contemporary portraiture, as she single-handedly changed the aesthetics of human representation in Turkish painting. She saw a mutual light in the eye of Zaptçioğlu, who, while still in her twenties, went on to become the center of four successful solo shows at Evin Art Gallery in Istanbul's swanky Bebek district, a place relatively sequestered in terms of its sociocultural immediacy to the constant international march of art lovers at the southern tip of the Bosphorus amid the fiery upticks of studio labors from the tight-knit networks of contemporary artists hard at work as they look out over the Anatolian coasts of the Sea of Marmara in the wildly popular neighborhoods of Kadıköy.

Among her contemporaries of the early Republic era, Erdok attained a monumental standing in Turkish art, lauded alongside the preeminent modern ceramicist Füreya Koral in the national spotlight after studying literature and history in Spain and fresco painting and stained glass in Paris at leading academies like the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. In 1981, she began teaching at Mimar Sinan, a post that has been instrumental to the emergence of many new and promising names in the highly concentrated art world of Istanbul. Inside the second-floor gallery at Öktem Aykut, which began four years ago as a core establishment in the local arts scene of the largest Turkish metropolis, co-founder Tankut Aykut gazes into the works of Zaptçioğlu to discuss with lucid warmth on the influential artistry of Neşe Erdok.

Near the constant clicks of flashing cameras by Galata Tower, its fourteenth century Genoese edifice attracting much of the world a few steps away, Aykut remarks on the reputation of Erdok as a creative descendent of the surrealist painter Arshile Gorky, an Armenian-American whose work continues to be discussed by the international media, as he remains at the center of controversies surrounding the obscurity of his otherwise marred reputation, which by all logical reasoning should have in fact catapulted him to the height of worldwide fame when Jackson Pollock stood in the limelight that was, to many, meant for him. Up a nondescript stoop on the colorful Portakal Street around the corner from the Tower, the niche airs of the Istanbul art world

resound in spectrums as diverse as the characters that have passed through its doors and halls to stare into color and texture and visualize novel ideas.

That Friday, the shrewd, curatorial duo, Tankut Aykut and Doğa Öktem began a permanent move to Şişhane by christening the new place off Meşrutiyet Avenue not far from Soho House with an opening to feature the works of Belgian-Turkish artist Sinan Logie, whose signature black-and-white, architectural abstractions on paper have clothed the bare walls of Öktem Aykut in the past with his uncannily intuitive, postmodern originality. Easing into the transition over tea at the gallery office, the ceaselessly ambitious pair sit where they have long welcomed guests under blanched ceilings in a century building down the street from Neve Shalom Synagogue once erected by a Jewish patriarch who moved upstream from Balat after earning his keep among the last generation of Ottoman subjects to join the more affluent of Europeanized minorities in the late nineteenth century.

Despite bemoaning the fate of Turkey in the latter two years after opening Öktem Aykut where they have come to experience a significant downturn in positive, international cultural integration in contrast to the recent past, they are leaning into the sharp corners, as they go out of the floundering touristic neighborhood in style, encouraged by the unfailing, universal duality that Zaptçioğlu captures through her scintillating oeuvre. She has, according to Aykut, advanced considerably from her earlier works. *Good, Bad, Cold, Hot* marks a turning point as she displays a special capacity for delivering the essence of life in the image of its ultimate flowering. Including eight untitled pieces, two sculpture works and oil paintings on canvas grace the main gallery floor, with various other works collected out of view. One of her finest pieces is hung in the compact office at Öktem Aykut, bearing certain resemblances to the art of Frida Kahlo as they both recurrently expose the vulnerable, nude woman, with child, over a reflective pool that she touches with vegetal, mammalian tendrils, contemplating the mythos of her psyche.

Ambling about the bijou interior, Aykut expounds on the art of Zaptçioğlu, relating her affinities to cohort Leyla Gediz, which is especially clear in her sole ceramic work, with its tufts of petrified flame exuding the character of its making. To roving eyes with a weakness for critical comparison, the supernatural primitivism of Henri Rousseau speaks through her work, as is particularly visible in her painting depicting the spiny trunk and thin leaves of a tropical tree cast against a dimly lit grey, indigo background. It has motifs that appear on her other canvases, asserting the qualities of earth, as one of the primary elements of mythical creation. Another of her earth scenes is deeply influenced by the portraiture of Erdok, as she presents the defeat of a monster who could exist in the children's book *Where the Wild Things Are*. Immersed in a near-opaque pool swimming with a serpentine monster, her embedded portraits surface anew from the element of water bearing a visage of gorgeous innocence, a sentiment that runs parallel with her traces of Naive post-impressionism.

Visionary in her talent for fusing the psychological complexities of human expression with the mythological forms of the archaic, preliterate imagination, she sculpted clay, plaster, and glue over a wooden plinth to shape the two-faced head of a chimera, one born of the fog that thickens

where history fades over that bold shroud of early Greek civilization still worn by the West as a matter of cultural pride over the philosophical triumph of reason. And yet, the artist and specifically the paintings of Zaptçiođlu appear as in a vision from beyond, reminding the obscurest corners of the brain that there are greater passions and realities that snake and unwind through the passages of every thought. In a distinctly broad canvas likened to the expansive oils of Tarık Töre, the chimera returns, transmogrified under her hand from its midsection into the upper body of a gazelle as it lays shrieking and clouded under an environment destroyed by the element of fire. Its setting is inspired by Çıralı village in the Lycian region on the southwest coast of Turkey where permanent gas vents pervade a burning landscape under peaks named after Olympus and the Chimera of old.

January 24, 12:03 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Moon

The regionally incomparable glitz of the European neighborhood of Nişantaşı is studded with all of the capitalist extravagance that defines Istanbul's wealthiest district. Almost every storefront appears to be a chain. And extended families of Arabic-speaking shoppers carry name brand bags with seemingly inexhaustible appetites for commercial wares untold.

Turkish residents are dressed fashionably, appearing as out of the department store advertisements that stare at passersby whose heads look cemented to smartphones while ambling along its unusually wide sidewalks relative to the greater, ancient metropolis. Then, Roma of all generations trudge through the crowded outdoor mall, clothed in loose-fitting *salwars* and long earrings as they bear the burden of the utterly wasteful, globalized society, marching aside the economic elite with wheeled carts of litter.

At a prestigious address on Abdi İpekçi Avenue, the gold-hued, second-floor window facade of Dirimart led to its simple gallery interior, where a history of contemporary Turkish art is uniquely preserved with formidable cultural report, and unsuspecting, considering first impressions entering its immediate environs. The prior exhibition at Dirimart prompted renewed and perennially vital interest in Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, the painter and poet esteemed as the Picasso of Turkish art by the national arts intelligentsia. Earlier on in its fastidiously keen programming, the space hosted another posthumous exhibition by the late visionary and transcendent master painter Deniz Bilgin.

Eyüboğlu was a contemporary of Âbidin Elderoğlu who lived most of his life in financial straits, while maintaining a teaching post at the İzmir Teacher Training School, which was generally uninspiring, even draining. He became most creative during the last years of his life, which were spent in Ankara, the city where Bilgin partly received her education, and where she tragically jumped from a ten-story building in 1999, committing suicide at the untimely age of forty-three.

In the Turkey of the twentieth century, being a modern artist, especially taken with abstraction, was a hard choice fraught with impracticality. Until the 1950s, most of the Turkish citizenry lived hand to mouth, to subsist and survive downturning waves of imperial dissolution and reformations in the wake of Atatürk's death in 1938. It was not until he retired from academia when Elderoğlu advanced his artistic principles. His is an uncompromising example of self-determination for all to live with an authentic creative voice.

Then director of Dirimart, Ceren Erdem, and Levent Özmen, house artist liaison, collaborated to curate the show, *Creating the Moon Anew*, focusing on the later years of Elderoğlu, mostly from 1969 to 1973, the year before his fated passing in the short span when he ultimately did realize his dream to live and work as a full-time artist.

He had held on tightly to his aspirations since his days in the 1930s as a student at the famous Academie Julian, and in the studios of Albert Laurens and Andre Lhote in Paris. As lucidly

explained by Özmen, the painters of Europe had developed techniques and styles, and even popular appreciation for abstract art initially and especially during the paradigm shifts of the era leading to World War I and in its aftermath. American exhibitions caught on soon after, however in Turkey, modernist expression in art remains a rarefied business in relation to global demand, only emphasizing the importance of its early adherents, like Elderoğlu.

To public knowledge, the name Elderoğlu as a critical artist is still obscure, due in great measure to the fact that his paintings are, until now, only held for common viewing in the collections of the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum, which remained closed for the last nine years anticipating plans to relocate within the shorefront complexes of Galataport Project construction beside Istanbul Museum in the shorefront neighborhood of Tophane.

Inside the offices at Dirimart, the tireless and insightful Levent Özmen is concluding work on a comprehensive book publication which will return the prescient Turkish modernism of Elderoğlu to the contemporary art map. In some four hundred pages, the book launch commemorated Elderoğlu's death anniversary on Feb. 12, when he left the world nearly half a century ago in 1974. It will feature brilliant images of his life's work, often captured, as for *Creating the Moon Anew*, by his brother-in-law and photographer Ozan Sağdıç along with commentary by prominent Turkish art historian Ahmet Kamil Gören.

Dirimart acquired rights to private collections from the family estate of Elderoğlu to produce an entire archival excavation of his art. From January to March, seventeen of his paintings were on display for *Creating the Moon Anew*. Its title piece is the only one explicitly named for the show, as Elderoğlu was not exactly moved by the potential of language when it came to appreciating his work. The approach is roughly shared by Mark Rothko, who sought to penetrate beyond name and genre, to see an artwork as independent of history and criticism toward an inner place of sheer, personal emotion. The concept, which the title of the exhibition signifies, draws from a method that Elderoğlu developed with an uncanny visual voice, that being to render the aesthetics and subjects of nature into abstract art. Although certainly challenging for the uneducated eye to discern pattern and any sense of real objectivity, his musical forms are far from arbitrary and random, and they are not improvised either.

As is clear from the sharp curation by Dirimart, his paintings, until the last year of his life, were shot through with a single current of artistic inquiry and practice. He employs bold aesthetic features such as to add layers of color and form in the foreground to contrast artificial designs with natural shapes. At first glance they appear altogether distinct from the rest of the painting yet are integrated skillfully. It is a technique demonstrated by the paintings of refugee Syrian artist Ibrahim al Hassoun, whose work is exhibited in Istanbul as part of the collection of the exiled Kelimat Gallery, originally based in Aleppo.

Throughout his works, Elderoğlu advances a signature to his craft, which he stylizes with his particular ways of playing with recurrence and variation. For example, there are bodies of paint that give the impression of being purely abstract workings of raw emotive expression, when in

fact they are exacting models, born of his indefinite imagination. In that way, his works question the repeatability of forms, as is central to the pedestrian mentality of popular consumer society with its virtual infinity of identically manufactured items. Instead, he flips the coin and repeats visible abstractions inspired by his studied observations of the natural world. The shape of a mass-produced cup is tossed into the same world as that of a leafless, gnarled and solitary tree in the dead of winter.

In the mind of Elderoğlu, if the creator of the universe was an artist, they would be an abstractionist. There is a subtle effect of individuation to perception that becomes clearer in the natural world, and for that reason modern people return to the forests and seas, deserts and wildernesses of the planet to return to themselves, to find where they begin, and end. With his careful brush, whether with watercolor on paper, or oil on burlap, Elderoğlu crystallizes the power and meaning of modern art as a means to approach what such seminal thinkers as William Blake and Aldous Huxley called the cleansing of "the doors of perception." With each stroke, in the manner of post-calligraphic, Asemic writing, the art of Elderoğlu is a wordless book out of time, devoid of names, eternal and yet urgent.

January 20, 11:54 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Identity

What is a person? Is personality simply the assumption of a character, one that the individual plays throughout life, enacting one particular, though mostly subconscious, performative drama of being? Such questions have raged down the halls of time as recorded in letters, one befitting the ancient presentiment that personhood is in fact based on a timeless and constant self-interrogation with the meaning and purpose of identity.

Since its emergence in history, namely in a tale by Pliny the Elder, the earliest manifestation of portraiture as the drawn representation of human form goes hand-in-hand with the impetus to make art. The earliest civilizations intuitively knew that human identification is fundamentally a creative process in dialogue with immortality.

For her essay in the publication accompanying *Look at Me!: Portraits and Other Fictions* from the la Caixa Contemporary Art Collection, curator Nimfa Bisbe Molin echoes the classic tale by Pliny the Elder, further exploring the act of preserving memory through portraiture and its contemporary transformations in the subjective and reflexive techniques and methods that advance a seamless proximity between the exhibiting artists and curious viewers who, for a passing experience in Pera Museum contribute to the increasing public consciousness of that mutual enterprise of perpetual and mysterious self-creation that is natural to all who exist, while for some it is embraced more adaptably and with a better sense of humor than others.

What began as the anecdote of a Corinthian maid imagined by Pliny the Elder in the first century of the common era as she innocently outlined the shadow of her beloved to preserve his memory before he left for war has since imploded into an age defined by the myth of Narcissus.

Addictively self-absorbing, the all-pervasive rise of social media has inflated the presence of every hyper-modernized individual into a virtual presence with a boundless reach, where all are swept in the capitalist zeitgeist, practically born to divulge in the almost god-like omnipresence of the fabricated and multifaceted avatars of themselves.

For most, it is an automated reality, one fixed by the collective rush of groupthink as espoused by dystopian novelists, famously in the works of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, as they have spouted cautionary metaphors spotlighting the unsurpassable megalomania that is manifest as the identity crisis of post-industrial, technophilic humanity.

For the select few with the intelligence and determination enough to pierce the veil of machine-driven realism, the final frontier for the authentic expression of human identity beyond the irresistibly seductive confines of streamlined devices is, as ever, in deeply thoughtful and radically original art that strikes at the root of what it means to portray a person, as oneself, and as another. In that spirit of inquiry, Molin drew from the unequalled, felicitous potency of the la Caixa Contemporary Art Collection based in Spain since 1985. Its over one thousand works of painting, sculpture, photography, video, film and installation by three hundred and nine artists

spanning thirty-seven countries are sleekly promoted under an umbrella organization that seeks to educate the greater public through international exhibitions that cultivate a distinctly universal appreciation of contemporary art.

In person, *Look at Me!* is challenging and uncanny, replete with enigmas that have the effect of making the human face transparent, a guise for the psychology of one historically, repressed creativity, that sourced in the invention of the self from the base of the imagination and into the mythopoetic spheres of collective fantasy.

It is one of the unbearable, existential trials of modernity to fare the uniformity of identity, one long processed by the workaday factory laborers and bureaucratic cogs of the ministerial offices, the service and extractive industries of the city and country respectively that mine the human head to an eerie emptiness. In typical fashion, the artist is condemned to merely reflect the growing pains of civilization from within, introspectively exhuming the soul of renewable inspiration from the perishable body of forms.

On the top two gallery floors at Pera Museum, the exhibition follows four themes: “Masks and Other Fictions”, “The Memory of the Face”, “Spotlight on Emotion,” “Conventions of Identity”. In the usual manner of the utterly transient first impressions that plague the more thoroughly enduring respect demanded by most contemporary art, the series of portraits by Gillian Wearing under the title, *Album* is as opaque in its underlying content as the often unreadable, overcomplicated prose that characterizes much of critical writing on new art. From the years of 2003 to 2006, the artist assumed the physical identity of her younger self, along with her entire nuclear family.

Freakishly unsettling, though breathtakingly admirable in terms of the peerless degree of calculated effort, skill and concept involved, one of the pieces reincarnates her brother candidly from his room, as entirely excavated from a freeze-frame of her personal past, where he stands in stained sweatpants, combing his long, brittle hair with an indifferent, pasty stare. A closer look shows the overlap where her skin is slightly visible behind the skin-tight masks and artificial integuments of her kin. It is an example of realism to the extreme, and all to deliver the point in brilliantly heightened visuals that she lives in all of them, however unglamorously.

The 1983 masterpiece, *Beast* by Jean-Michel Basquiat makes a welcome appearance, adding to the tremendous international profile of the exhibition, and of la Caixa, as a forerunner in the world of contemporary art for all. Through his peerless gift as a Neo-Expressionist who made waves under the wings of Warhol in the downtown New York of the dying decade, *Beast* gravitates with the epitome that was Basquiat in the public eye, a young black man sensitive to the categorical African primitivism forced down his throat and that of his fellow persons of color by the institutional and rhetorical racism of the politicized, American cultural establishment.

“Spotlight on Emotion” covers an analogous social range, with its grandest piece by Pedro Mora portraying the proud visage of Amber Smoot, an Afro-Japanese teenager from New York made



with cold ceramic in 1998 and titled after her name. It is not a secret that race plays a central role in the manufacturing of identity, especially considering the impositions of the globalized postcolonial political infrastructure where the peoples of most nations are defined from within and externally according to ethnic social boundaries.

There are some thirty pieces on display for *Look at Me!* to chronicle the depths of self-consciousness through an experiential concourse in which seers may focus and uncover an inner reflection of themselves, one born of the impetus that once inspired a fictive, ancient Roman maid to sketch the first portrait in history.

One of the more participatory pieces is *The Milk Wood* by Curro González from 1999, a sprawling 535-cm-wide oil on canvas hung across one of the more expansive walls on the topmost gallery floor at Pera, surrounded by an abundantly spacious visual field through which the enthused and intrepid of Istanbul's urbane float to gain perspective in the spiritual refuge that lives in spaces dedicated to pure artistry.

Paired with a laminated placard to reveal the hidden portraits within its dense, sylvan landscape, such literary muses and intellectual luminaries as the poet William Carlos Williams, the composer Duke Ellington, and the surrealist Paul Klee are only apparent to the more searching eyes given to finding those fabled and unknowable, metaphysical places where the world opens unseen portals that lead through to the heart of becoming, toward the higher self that moves in concert with the sustained metamorphoses of creation.

January 27, 10:12 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Simulacra

The spacious, clean wooden desk of a gallerist's workplace is an inviting sight. Sleek computers are lit, if not open. Hot, caffeinated drinks are readily served, if not in hand. Fashionable curators are surrounded by high shelves stocked with large, colorful exhibition catalogues and art books bearing famous names alongside the more obscure whose inner circles demand that the inquisitive public take a closer look.

Conversations ensue in a heady, esoteric atmosphere conceivably similar to the exchanges between powerful magicians sharing delicate secrets. It is an air in which theories alternate between sides of the mind with a casual liberation from the norms of the street, where most concepts rarely touch ground, and where the flightiest whims of the artistic imagination are free to spread both wings and ascend tirelessly into the stratospheres of new thinking at the creative cusps of history and technology.

In a peaked frame of mind, Gökhan Balkan sat before Tuana Pulak, then assistant director at Versus Art Project and pontificated with an intensive focus on the theme of his solo exhibition, extrapolating broadly on the central motif behind its title, *The Third Nature*. In a time-bending streak of cerebral discourse, he championed the ideological significance of his work with a mental charge comparable to the earth-shaking might of a wild stallion galloping at full speed over the psychological landscapes of the current paradigm, focusing ever so exactly on the edge of the present.

His creations evoke fragmented, distended and uncomfortable overlaps where the cyclical and linear patterns of existence spiral out from decadent, anthropocentric evolution. He presages an age defined by the independently self-reproducing and intercommunicative artificial intelligences that people will foreseeably leave to a post-human earth made barren and lost to the potent blink of the sun, the saving rush of water, the lasting compass of wind, where only the rawest foundation of nature survives the turn of the epochal tide to renew its universal energy unchecked by a ravaging, dominant species.

Balkan is a serious intellect. He lavishes his audience remotely through his art and expansively in person with generous doses of insight and knowledge, spanning everything from his critiques on Renaissance humanism to a detailed interpretation of the sixteenth century painting by Holbein the Younger, the famed oil on oak, *The Ambassadors*. His musings on Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hegel, Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Žižek and Ray Kurzweil are practically boundless as he conveys the essence of his art as a fundamental inquiry into the definitions of reality and the mind.

His core terminology for his solo exhibition at Versus Art Project is ultimately fixed on an enumeration of the progressions of nature. For example, whereas "The First Nature" connotes the natural environment, and "The Second Nature" industrial construction, "The Third Nature" points to a shadowy realm only dissected by the boldest of futurist thinkers. To form his notions about an increasingly nonfictional simulacrum in which smart machines reproduce each other

and create new languages without human intervention, he consistently returns to a momentous conversation held between Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg, the two leading global innovators whose names are household synonyms for the most advanced technological leaps in contemporary living.

"We think that this whole universe is created for human beings. It's very easy to think egocentric, or anthropocentric. Even in this AI discussion, we think it's dangerous for human beings, but maybe it's better for human evolution," says Balkan, as he sips his coffee in between effusive bouts of dialogue questioning the humanist basis of postmodern identity with an extraordinary capacity to reflect on the pervasion of intelligent technology among his peers.

When I say 'The Third Nature,' there can be a Fourth Nature, or Fifth or Sixth, there can be an infinite number of these Natures. If there are only two, that which is given and made, then we will think in a dual way. But when we say three or four the dualism is over.

"Anything that is unknown to us. Anything that we fear we cannot overcome, that we cannot fight, that might be stronger, we automatically think of destroying it or completely abandoning it," Pulak responded, smartly dressed and clearly well versed in the concepts of her current artist at Versus Art Project, as she prepared the entire gallery for Balkan's works that he had produced especially for the space for some eight months in 2017.

Up until this point, everything we have talked about is between 'The Second Nature' and 'The Third Nature,' but we have completely abandoned 'The First Nature,' which you call the truth, which is something that isn't formulated with culture, social norms or identity, but is something that exists before we are born when we are in the womb. Again, it is unknown.

With its leanings toward the expressly more subversive, spotlighting emerging perspectives while encompassing the world of international art fairs, Versus Art Project keeps an eye on empty zones of privation and erosion where art has a singular potency as a source of fresh creative energy.

Drawing from such themes as identity loss, gender inequality, migrant displacement, and the bitter end of gentrification, the gallery embraces *The Third Nature* by Balkan for his peculiar attention to the “coincidentia oppositorum” of de/construction as provoked by the capitalist extremes of technocratic globalization, illustrating with his distinctive techniques the more sensitive areas of life today by exposing the utter vulnerability of being human in the face of bleak, robotic times.

His works are aesthetically distinct in three sculptural pieces *huMAN PERIOD*, *Illusion Zone*, *Post Human / Anti-Identity*, and in six series: “Simulacrum”, “Self-Portrait”, “Flawed Relation”, “Ground”, “Breakthrough”, “Accumulation”.

On entering Versus Art Project, upstairs from the old-fashioned Hanif Han building foyer below the architectural elaborations of its three-story bay window engraved with the date 1904, the Simulacrum Series is immediately apparent, comprised of five larger canvases and twenty-four smaller pieces, all of them the product of mixed techniques employing methods integrating chance causation through processes of image transfer.

Balkan traveled to the Anatolian neighborhood of Kozyatağı in Istanbul's eastern outskirts for the series, first photographing hundreds of angles among the ubiquitous and uncountable high rises before transforming them into icons of the dystopian imagination befitting the literary persuasions of J.G. Ballard a la his 1975 novel *High-Rise*.

His pieces bear textural resonances in line with his philosophic decentralization from all that is anthropocentric in the manmade confines of modern realism and its manifestations as they are unceasingly erected in the glaring light of day. The nucleus of his visual proclamations gain three-dimensionality with *Illusion Zone*, a half-built construction project pieced together into an unlikely plastic collage of sheep bone and computer parts.

With *huMAN PERIOD* he asserts the crystallization of his artistic advocacy with *The Third Nature*. The figure of a man holds open the definitive industry book, "Architects' data" at a page in which building proportions are measured to the human body. Petrified with cracked plaster, it exudes the abstraction and futility of humankind striving against the reality of creation as its functioning courses through a person, its ultimate subject in the process of remaking itself.

Much of *The Third Nature* is dense, difficult, even insufferable, as with the grotesque and disturbing "Flawed Relation" and "Self Portrait" series, yet in the "Ground" series Balkan offers a visual respite, however haunted by the concrete artifice of its natural facade, outwardly fated to total, post-human desertion.

January 31, 11:15 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Sanctuary

True to its literal definition as the orbit of colliding bodies and unconscious forces encircling the planet out of sight and out of mind, artist and curator Seyhan Musaoğlu opened Space Debris in Karaköy in 2014-15 in the wake of coincidences. In New York City, she pursued a fine arts education and formed an experimental sound group, dancing under choreographer Michael Clark at the 2012 Whitney Biennial with her friend Osmancan Yerebakan, a writer and curator based in New York.

Later, he introduced her to Anıl Doğan, who would become the owner of Press Karaköy, the ground floor cafe below Space Debris. After years of artistic collaboration in New York City, the independent exhibition room that she founded in Istanbul still attracts fate.

Fast forward to the January opening of *Sanctuary* by the polymath C.M. Kösemen, who Musaoğlu never forgot as her fellow student at Koç School on the eastern edge of Istanbul's more verdant Anatolian countryside. He was a brazen outsider, an eyesore to some, simply a question mark to many, as he spent his off-hours facedown in the grass to examine bugs.

His embryonic interest in entomology became a catalyst for his future life as an artist and researcher with astute and compulsive fascination in evolutionary biology as material for the otherworldly beings that he paints with exacting detail against progressively original palettes. His intellectual modesty shines through his personable sense of humor, as he snaps his trusty digital camera while discussing the substance and methods behind his scientific inquiries which inspired his *Sanctuary*.

"I've been painting all my life and professionally for the last eight years having exhibitions on and off. From a young age I knew what I liked and what I wanted to be about. And that was worlds beyond our own, creatures and beings and settings that come straight out of the subconscious," Kösemen said, introducing himself and his work in broad strokes and sharp illustrations as he speaks with a candid ease punctuated by the kind of intermittent pauses that are characteristic of thinking persons.

Growing up, I was always and I'm still interested in the worlds of paleontology, evolutionary history, extinct animals, and basically the trigger was the ability to see strange creatures and strange worlds. If I could have a life experience that I constantly live for that would be it, to see strange new beings and worlds.

In 2010, Kösemen met Kerimcan Güleryüz of The Empire Project. His art would never be the same. Before their dialogues, Kösemen could identify a bone and from it draw the full body of the species impeccably, as a scientist might catalogue observations from the field. Güleryüz unleashed a creative liberation in Kösemen, prompting him to experiment with symbolism, to explore the depths of his mind without overthinking quality and realism. Kösemen remembers

the experience of his inner revolution as a painter after meeting Güleryüz, likening it to the metaphor of turning on a rusty tap, waiting patiently as the sputtering liquid runs steady, clear.

"This exhibit represents for me the forming of a background and the forming of a world almost emerging from the fog, and you can see that most clearly in this large piece, *Sitting Figure* [2017]. Beforehand I was always drawing these mythical, chimeric beings and they were all the creature itself on a white background or a lightly colored background, a bit like [*Hantaris*, 2017] the tall, greenish-yellow painting and that small painting [*Reptilian*, 2015] with the wizard and reptile," said Kösemen, while sitting atop the single desk inside Space Debris to survey his works, naturally lit by a picture window looking out at the antique crosses and cracked bells of an old Turkish Orthodox church.

In the last year I felt that a world needed to come into being. Slowly but surely it did. Technically, it's me coming to grips with landscapes. Symbolically and mentally, it's the emergence of a world. As the title suggests, it's the reflection of a need to seek Sanctuary.

Kösemen previously exhibited at Space Debris in an experimental performance context for *Patron's Experiment* in 2015. An anonymous commission had him behind closed doors for four days under camera surveillance inside the gallery space while listening to an electronic dance number on repeat for four hours each day. It was a test of patience, character and skill.

Kösemen walked away with a fat check proving that his art, like that of all authentic visionaries, is able to thrive in the midst of capitalist manufacturing and popular culture. It is arguably through such exchanges between trade and art when cities and communities evolve. Although creatives by vocation are generally deeply and often oppressively entangled in worldly commerce, the source and realization of the intuitive presence they cultivate within and to all through the mediums of free expression are born of self-determination, unconstrained and even stimulated by the impositions of moneyed power and cultural consumerism.

"Of course, an artist's artistic development never stops. I've sometimes been accused of being apolitical. I would daresay that if you look at my work as a whole, that kind of escapism, that kind of subtle hint of yearning to see a new world is as political as you can get. The desire to see a new world unites everyone in Turkey whatever side they are on. Fantasy can express very real things about where a society is heading or what has been inflicted upon it," Köseman said, as he muses on the logical movement in his works from that of the invented biological specimens to his "Organic Houses" series, which essentially answers the spiritual and also political demand for *Sanctuary* with the fleshy exterior designs of earthen homes that bloomed from the seeds of his memories spying the architectural drawings and books of his father, the reputed photographer Sıtkı Kösemen.

Everyone is in a constant search of a place they can truly call their home. This exhibit responds to the view that you can always leave the city but it will never leave you. Conversely, you don't need to physically leave your country and embark on a wild goose chase as a qualified refugee in

another country. If you find that clarity, that way to travel within your mind then you are set. You've already found asylum.

In the summertime, Kösemen travels with blank sheaves of paper, some pencils and sketches his "Organic Houses" impromptu, as he would his paintings which he produces while immersed in his studio interiors during the fall, winter and spring. He is expressly satisfied with the curation by Musaoğlu and Güteryüz, who selected eight of his drawings for display from twenty-four pieces in total.

*Sanctuary* exhibits ten acrylics, many of which he sprayed with water as part of his process to emphasize marine textures in the spindly, vegetal forms that rise as from the ocean floor of a sunken, protozoan world. Plumbed from his voracious readings of scientific periodicals, almost every creature is as a new species, except for an anthropoid figment flying about with winged eyes. It appears as the feature piece, *The Staring Moon* (2016), only upright in Space Debris, after a framing accident.

As illuminated by Musaoğlu, the advancement of palette is central to the defining, latest innovation from the young artist who is the subject of the documentary *Tangent Realms: The Worlds of C.M. Kösemen* by Kevin Schreck, and also the author of the book *Osman Hasan and the Tombstone Photographs of the Dönmes* which he lectures on internationally. Eschewing the opacity of *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka, he praises *The Book of Imaginary Beings* by Jorge Luis Borges. His piece, *Orosei* (2016) is the only painting at Space Debris that could be said to be without a foreground subject, as his waving brush washes over a slab of board recalling Munch's *The Scream* (1893) only silenced, emergent, of *Sanctuary*.

February 3, 10:33 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Transcendental

How did computers become so irresistibly attractive? The centrality of the digital world leapt from the hard realism of science to the soft machinations of culture. It first crept from the bulky and cryptic monochromes of the mechanical past to the sleek and shiny multiform spectrums, increasingly personalized and mutually developed according to the primacy of the individual.

Every passing quarter on tech companies' yearly calendars hits closer to home. The unavoidable question of the twenty-first century remains unanswered. If the forms of media are merely tools, or means to an end, then what is the purpose of it all? In other words, where is this going?

An even more charged inquiry wonders how people are so lured, almost unwillingly at times, in semi-conscious states of social pressure and instant gratification to the point where people identify with the representation of themselves on screens wired for the superhuman power of virtually infinite information transfer. Controversy surrounds the idea of a force, even a metaphysical entity on the other end of the digital universe, transfixing the entire world.

Waylaying humanity at its current, evolutionary crossroads is the eerie *Noise* not unlike silence that resounds in the presence of the dominant enigma following such unexplainable self-examinations. When logical reasoning fails to capture the prevailing sense of direction presaged by modernism and the nuclear age, enter artists, who are unrestricted in the realms of boundary dissolution as the world and everyone in it becomes increasingly and enchantingly digitized.

Considering the novelty and potency of very recent technological leaps, present-day lifestyles are understandably defined by mass immaturity. As a result, general procrastination and utter bafflement characterizes the oversaturated deployment of media and its effects, concentrated in the private lives of adolescents the world over, an unprecedented dissemination that the American professor Dr. Cornel West referred to as "weapons of mass distraction".

Among the late twentieth century generation of public thinkers espousing cautionary tales and mind-boggling fascinations on the subject independent of formal academia and the normative cultural establishment was author Terence McKenna, who spoke eloquently with references to history and mathematics about the mysterious attractor that he called "the transcendental object at the end of time".

Space Debris founder, artist and curator Seyhan Musaoğlu is a keen and charming guide for those curious enough to trespass the unseen border where the manifest constructs of the present overlap into the singularity, where the causes for contemporary life are sourced not in the past, but in an intelligent, though not necessarily anthropocentric, future. She leads across thoroughfares over former streams now blinded with the rush of traffic and under countless, towering, glossy windows refracting blades of sunlight between colossal, oblong edifices. Turnstiles and escalators give way to assembly-line food courts, then underground to blank, polished hallways muted by glass walls where white collars sit and stretch on backless sofas for



smartphone staring contests. Previously hosting modernist art exhibitions in the level -2 art gallery at Orjin Maslak Business Center, fellow artist Mert Keskin, who exhibits at *Noise* under his alias Haydiroket, collaborated with Musaoğlu to transform the foundations of the prevailing commercial complex into a space for profound creative reflection on the business of postmodern identity and simulated experience.

On display through February, featuring thirty-one artists, many enjoying international prestige in the varying fields of digital art, such as the Canadian new media artist Lorna Mills, the Japanese video innovator Yoshi Sodeoka and the award-winning internet artist Tom Galle, the *Noise* Digital Festival is the first of four exhibitions at Orjin Sanat, which will encompass three upcoming themes, namely “Water”, and “Meat” in two parts.

Musaoğlu took her inspiration for the trilogy from the writings of Douglas Kahn, who focused on audible aesthetics in his MIT Press book, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Voice, Sound, and Aurality in the Arts*. In his introduction, he distinguishes sound from noise with his acute studies of the cultural histories and social ecologies in which they emerge and are heard, recognized, named, adapted, disrupted and developed.

Musaoğlu and Haydiroket extended the curatorship of *Noise* from the online-exclusive, digital art biennial The Wrong, which in its third year held the show GFX Free Error at Space Debris from Nov. 1, 2017 to Jan. 31, 2018. Its core philosophy revolved around the notion of defect as an art reference, a recurring concept and unfortunate experience that is all-too-familiar in the technology sphere. *Noise* features some of the same artists, such as Belgrade-based Milos "Sholim" Rajkovic, celebrated as "The Freaky GIF Head Guy" by *Vice* in 2014 and the motion designer VFmt, specializing in such arts as 3D environments and experimental animation. *Workaholic* by Sholim is projected at Orjin Sanat in apt circumstances as it evokes the din of rusty cogs run by a homunculus exercising a brain inside the disemboweled skull of a suited office worker.

"We show works that illustrate the development of digital media history. You see works that are depicted on analog TV screens, which are glitchier and more pixelated, to very HD quality animations and 3D modeling. GIF is one of the major streams that made digital art widespread on the Internet. It was very accessible and everyone could use it. From there it was introduced to contemporary art circles. It's still very new, as we know," said Musaoğlu as she walks about Orjin Sanat deeply immersed in the *Noise* of her curation, often traveling from downtown where her Space Debris currently hosts more organic subjects by the painter C.M. Kösemen.

The artists are mostly well known in their fields. Ages vary widely. The exhibition, in general, talks about the iterations and reflections of us as beings in the digital world. It's a range of representation on personas and how people choose to represent themselves and interact. In the midst of constantly flowing images, we stop and ask, "'Who are we?' 'Do we exist only within our virtual personalities or do these digital identities free us more?'

*Selfie Series* by Tom Galle is shown on a mini tablet touchscreen where viewers interactively scan through the works as they would on a social media platform. He has a sharply critical eye for the smartphone aesthetic, objectified for all of its pure indulgence in the shared fantasies and collective consensus of computerized identity. There are political metaphors at hand in such creative media criticism, comparing the guise of democracy as nothing more substantial than the whip of red fabric before a charging bull, as the voting public is skewered and humiliated before the multitudes of abstainers.

It is placed diagonally across from a video *Untitled* by Jacques Urbanska and Franck Soudan, which is networked to a server to generate imagery that never repeats itself, emitting an endless stream of everything from war-torn Iraq to a rotating multi-armed excavator over a barren construction site.

"The virtual self starts controlling you when it's supposed to be you wanting to represent your best. Information is constantly fed to us and it seems that we're controlling that information, but we're not," said Musaoğlu standing before the digital print, *Sleep ASCII-Ordered* by her curatorial collaborator Haydiroket, whose *Standard* triptych at the window facing the entrance to Orjin Sanat grips the eye immediately with its swimming hues over the sculpted face of Apollo in the foreground of a basic grid alongside his antique visage reprogrammed into form through raw pixelated computational language.

The representation of oneself becomes that digital being. As it loops it creates this trance effect. That's the artist. In each 'Noise' there is a reflection of us.

February 10, 12:13 AM

## Deletion

Elisabeth Denys and Tareq Daoud first heard of Abkhazia about a year ago while living in Istanbul to produce new collaborative ideas. Denys, a social sciences researcher and audiovisual producer from France, and Daoud, an Afghani-Swiss photographer and filmmaker, received an unexpected and intriguing open call to enter the inaugural artist residency program at SKLAD Cultural Institute in the Abkhazian capital city of Sukhum on the Black Sea coast between Sochi, Russia and Batumi, Georgia. Its political and territorial autonomy as the Republic of Abkhazia is only recognized by Russia, along with a handful of smaller states.

In Turkish, the Abkhaz are known under the umbrella group of Circassian, referring to the various peoples of the Caucasus, including the Ubykh, whose entirely oral language is extinct since 1992 when its last speaker Tevfik Esenç passed away. In Abkhaz, which UNESCO lists as an endangered language, SKLAD means depot, destined for display in the old tobacco depot of Istanbul that transformed from 2005 to 2009 into the multipurpose arts and culture complex Depo, an initiative by Anadolu Kültür in support of regional projects that protect international diversity and cultural rights.

The year 1864 is a momentous period in the history of Caucasian peoples, marking an epochal shift as Russian imperialism divided Abkhazian Muslims, exiling them to Turkey. The aftermath of 1864 is still felt by Abkhaz families in Turkey, where they have struggled for communal integrity. The traumas of deportation are embedded, as they remember the loss of the homeland after awaiting inhumane passage along the coast of the beloved Black Sea that spread them out along different Black Sea harbors, such as in the province of Düzce.

While proudly maintaining ancestral Abkhazian identities, the diaspora became famously patriotic in Turkey, making great sacrifices on the embattled fronts of the Ottoman Empire. In the Republic of Abkhazia of the present, Russian aid makes up over half of the national budget, escalating since the 1992-1993 war with Georgia in return for an enviable strategic military base on the Black Sea. In the eyes of the world, formally the U.N., the Abkhazian citizenry are members of a secessionist state of Georgia as they are only issued passports through Russia according to specific visa applications. Yet, they are not granted Russian residency, and being outside of international conventions they must live without an airport and postal service, as all mail is routed exclusively through Sochi.

The after effects of economic embargo, coupled with the national security challenges that come with persisting as an unrecognized state define contemporary life in Abkhazia, a reality that Denys and Daoud learned quickly while residing in Sukhum and working at SKLAD to prepare the foundation that would become *Deletion Marks* at Depo. In many cases, seemingly simple matters like replacing a light from precious Russia goods and acquiring a glass container from a Georgian craftsman erupted into echoes of the surrounding geopolitical crises.

The centerpiece of *Deletion Marks* is titled *Circulatory Shock*. It is a commercial balance scale hung with Turkish and Russian transfusion sets filled with soil extracts from Düzce and Sokhum respectively spilled out and weighed by the blaring metaphors of earth and blood lost to the ongoing condition of armed territorial disputes.

"How long can one bleed?" Denys wrote on the traumas of holding fast to unity and identity despite the dismemberments of modern history. As a young artist, Denys admits that *Circulatory Shock* may seem simplistic, though when she arrived to Abkhazia she met a fellow traveler from Turkey who was overcome with a need to see her country, demonstrating the visual metaphor in lived experience.

The way to Sukhum from Istanbul is a day and half to the city of Zugdidi overland by bus, van and taxi before crossing the border on foot. Abkhaz and Russians fly to Sochi and enter with special papers, but foreigners must pass under the surveillance of the Georgian authorities who stake out the main bridge into and out of Abkhazia, as it is technically outlaw territory where the Russian military awaits on the other side.

That said, travel is not necessarily prohibitive for Abkhazian people, although the land base once known as the Russian Riviera is a largely a figment of the past for vacationing families who once relished in its wine-producing subtropics and snow-capped alpine range which boasts the world's shortest river from source to mouth.

With a sharp intellect and knack for cross-cultural enterprise, Denys is as bright as she is blunt as she sparks energy into the exhibition space that she formed with Daoud over a few bouts of interactive chemistry. In Turkey, the 500,000-strong Abkhaz are still slight enough of a minority and politically nationalist to boot as proud multigenerational veterans from the Turkish War of Independence that they hardly cause a stir.

Denys prepared the full opening of *Deletion Marks* with mosquito repellent smoke wafting about the room to recall the malaria-infested wetlands that Abkhazian exiles suffered resettling in nineteenth-century Turkey. In response, the celebrated academic expert Jade Cemre Erciyes said they crystallized the topics so well in the four works at the exhibition that it would take her two hundred pages to summarize just one. *Compulsory Education* (2017), for example, is a multimedia composite of archaic education materials, illustrated fabrics teaching children in the sixty-two letters of the Abkhaz alphabet with Turkish and Russian vocabularies, burned and lit through with projected videos documenting Abkhazian testimonies.

"We drew ideas on napkins in a bar. We were just talking. It was for fun, but we were selected [by SKLAD]. They received some one hundred and fifty applications but all of them were more about Russian influence or Georgian war. We were the only ones offering something about Turkey," Denys said coolly with her thick northern French accent recounting how *Deletion Marks* opening the attending public to a warm reception, as followers looked forward to the discussion panel featuring Erciyes, writer Elbruz Aksoy and an Abkhaz representative named Tayfun.

I come from journalism and production so for me I'm more didactic. I like to explain. I would love to schools come to the exhibition and be able to understand. All of the texts tell a lot. We tried something between artistic work and historical, editorial work.

Initially exhibiting in Sukhum before moving to Istanbul, the emotional power of *Deletion Marks* is buried deep in the soul of its subjects, now emergent with the sustained focus of two sensitive minds who have raised the ancestral call of Abkhazia to speak through its people despite the amnesias and displacements of its history.

Although new to the culture and personally removed from the hostilities, Denys and Daoud released stimulated unheard dialogues from the Abkhazian diaspora and its strained homecoming. In the piece, *Fade In / Fade Out* a woman from Düzce plays an Abkhazian folk tune as a melancholy dirge on accordion only to hear it followed as an uproarious anthem by a national musician in Abkhazia. As an old man interviewed to pithy effect: "As long as the world exists it won't happen. Even if only ten of us were left we won't forget about Abkhazia."

February 10, 6:29 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Collagist

Vik Muniz's prompt to create what was in his heart and what would later become a worldwide sensation first came from the barrel of a gun. A bullet struck young Muniz in the leg during an unfortunate, while all-too-common day in the life of a poor Brazilian boy in his hometown of Sao Paulo, where his life's inspiration was unborn surrounded by the blunt shards of brutalized and neglected humanity.

The traumatic moment realigned his stars, as he was awarded a settlement that he quickly changed to dollars on the streets of New York, where he looked through the life-changing perspective of a camera lens to focus on his art. It was not until he moved to the United States and discovered European postmodernism and the Japanese group Mono-ha when he decided to become an artist, preserving his fondness for South America by reading the magical realism of Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar and Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Film director Lucy Walker affirmed the power behind the earthbound vision of Muniz, the centerpiece of her Oscar-nominated movie that documents his liberating Brazilian garbage pickers from the shackles of poverty by turning them into the highly valued subjects of his mixed-media works, ultimately giving them his proceeds from the sales.

In an interview following the release of her deeply moving film, she explained how he essentially found his creative voice by photographing the missing pieces of the materialist's consumer puzzle: leftovers, condiments, junk and pollution. Before crystallizing his chosen medium through the click of a shutter, he found initial success as a sculptor, holding his first solo show in 1988 only five years after relocating to New York City during one of its more socially eruptive times when shock art, neo-Expressionism, deconstructivist design and neo-pop were crests on the waves of underground experimentalism.

Since the advent of modernism, contemporary art increasingly trended toward subjective abstraction to revolutionize the naturalist portrayal of objects into an enlightenment of reflexive perspectives arguably best summarized by the father of new media criticism, Marshall McLuhan, who declared, "The medium is the message."

In response, Muniz gravitated to photography as a way to process his recurring motifs. He was not satisfied with only sculpting what he could see. Instead, the sculptures themselves would be the starting point through which he would conceive meticulously rendered still images. In other words, Muniz distills his craft as a search for visual correspondence between the technical and the personal.

He aspires to produce a universal language, walking a line invisible to most where the fickle nature of the mind is open to the precisions of manufactured reality. For his first solo show in Istanbul, self-titled *Vik Muniz* and featuring eighteen of his works, Dirimart's gallerists in the industrial district of Dolapdere curated four of his internationally reputed series, including

“Metachrome”, “Pictures of Magazine”, “Postcards from Nowhere” and “Repro”. Their common thread is the effect of visceral optical illusions, characteristic of Muniz with his chaotic assemblages in detail harmonized when unified with the singular aesthetics of his peculiar brand of neorealism, one in which the slightest distance of perspective makes all the difference.

Before walking under the high ceilings of Dirimart, a venturesome art enthusiast is abruptly steeped in the range of social spectrums of Dolapdere. The often jammed freeway outside the ground-floor entrance is muffled once in the luxurious office building at 1-9 Irmak Avenue, where the signature gold hue of the Dirimart logo is emblazoned next to exhibition banners waving in industrial wind tunnels at the foot of ascending hills pockmarked with substandard housing and irregular factories.

In such a challenging environment of contrasts, the empathetic art of Vik Muniz is all the more fitting considering his work with similarly disaffected Brazilians in the behemoth cities of Latin America. In the eye of the urbanization hurricane, Dirimart Dolapdere immerses guests in an otherworldly respite of unbound artistry. Yet, the aesthetics of Muniz are not simply pacifying.

At second glance, his works are deeply entwined with worldly critique and alternative insights into the prevailing cultural norms of the popular imagination and its image-making. Standing at a common vantage point to appreciate the entire frame of one of his works, a beautiful picture is clear, its elements in unison. A closer look stimulates the natural ability of the mind to notice variations to the extent that not only is the total image lost in kaleidoscopic detail, but it breaks down enough to lead to an entirely new visual experience.

His series, “Pictures of Magazine” and “Postcards from Nowhere” examine the irrational abstractions of capitalist-driven cultural production as with the roving magnifying glass of a voracious tabloid reader, a paper hoarder of travel memorabilia, a paranoid conspiracy theorist buried in clippings.

As for his “Repro” series, he ingeniously reconstructs modern masterpieces, from *The Boy Camille Roulin* (1888) by Vincent van Gogh to *The White Girl* (1861–1862) by James Whistler, with the exacting craft of a sculptor shaping his underlying metaphysical demonstrations to question the ordinary assumptions of art appreciation. That the ordinary mind sees a masterpiece in the shredded rubbish of a short-lived periodical is as much a testament to the basic quality of the human mind as much as it is to the work of the artist himself.

Brazilian art critic and curator Ligia Canongia employed high-minded references to Plato and Jean Baudrillard to expound on his 2014 exhibition *The Size of the World* held in Porto Alegre. In a thick publication to celebrate the famous artist in his native land, she writes of his ability to unmask the illusion of appearances. Through his works, Muniz has the character of a compassionate, creative intellect whose goodwill is not only limitless, but transcendent as he mixes the sacred and the profane of the globally dominant secular paradigm in the overlapping and simultaneous dialectics of his rigorously composed forms. From the solemn poor to a

shallow tourist, his works are capable of reaching the beauty and magic that all people carry within, independent of personal and cultural history. It is a truth that all may rediscover by simply looking at such art, and Muniz offers the opportunity with special consideration to those outside the narrow confines of the cultural elite.

Every image doubles as a trick of the mind, an unseen transformation of its materials coming to life through semiconscious processes of perception and recognition. What seems to be a reproduction of *Italian Garden* (1913) by Klimt is actually an ordered mashup of crushed pastels from his “Metachrome” series. A shy glance into the *Origin of the World* inspired by Gustave Courbet from his “Pictures of Magazine” series is exposed as a sensitive collage of magazine cutouts depicting babies and women.

From afar and to the untrained eye, Muniz appears to have captured the prodigious originality of the painters in each deliberate brushstroke adapted in his mixed-media invention, snapped onto a digital C-print. In the exhibition's feature piece, *Istanbul* from the “Postcards from Nowhere” series, Muniz strikes at the root of the most cliché of all Turkish aesthetics, ripped from the omnipresent, typecast landscape of the Sublime Porte, as fragments of handwritten stereotypes glorifying the classic view are sprawled against stilted spires reflecting over an unreal, glassy Bosphorus.

"I cannot imagine my audience. I never could. I do not have a specific person of a certain age, sex, academic background in mind ... nothing," Muniz told writer and curator Kathy Battista, formerly the director of contemporary art at Sotheby's Institute of Art in New York when she conducted an interview with him for the May 2009 issue of the art magazine *Res*, a publication that Dirimart then worked to return to print.

When you are just outside of it just imagining things, there is the gap. A lot of my interests come from this gap between reality and intellect. I do not believe in intellectual property. If you learn something, you should pass it on.

February 14, 12:01 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Mountain

In the shadow of Mount Hesareg, local Zaza folklore speaks of mystical burial grounds on the alpine slopes where the saintly spirits of the revered departed watch over surrounding villagers as faithful protectors in the afterlife. Etched with footpaths that once guided ancient Babylonian and Greek soldiers as Alexander the Great avenged successive Persian invasions, the ground is alive with visible narratives of East and West, of love and hate in many a bygone human presence behind the masks of its all-encompassing nature. In the last hundred years, the snowy range has witnessed historic changes, from the power struggles of warring clans to the escape of refugees seeking asylum under the sheltering air.

During summers, the seasoned painter Mahmut Celayir returns to the mountain to revisit his birthplace in nearby Bingöl, often camping for months in the foothills below the wild summit. The land is his creative nucleus, the raw material for a wholly original painting aesthetic that he has advanced for over three decades while living mostly between Stuttgart and Istanbul. In his childhood memories and until today, he forms a playful relationship to the earth around his family home, especially during its hot season as it grows from the shrubs and soil, cultivated by the stories and villages that bear witness to the merging of planet and universe, atmosphere and rock, the unending unification of all that is on the timeless horizon.

Celayir left the bountiful, regenerative abode of his rural beginnings to study art in the haunting, irresistible megalopolis of Istanbul. In the 1970s, it took him a day's journey overland to arrive in the last Ottoman capital where he enrolled in the Special High School for Art, one of two chief institutions that existed at the time in Turkey for budding painters. Now housed in Marmara University Fine Art Faculty in Acıbadem, Kadıköy, its rival was Mimar Sinan Fine Arts Academy, which taught more formal approaches aligned to the Turkish cultural establishment, whereas the freer Bauhaus movement of Germany influenced the Special High School for Art.

As a young student of graphic art, his initial drawings were simple portraits, typically depicting the old-fashioned, aging countrymen of Turkey. In his immediate artistic progression, before he found his most enduring signature voice on canvas, he designed the contours of land through serigraphy techniques that he continued to develop in Germany while engraving zinc cityscapes of Istanbul's oldest quarters. Painting entered his repertoire through his practices with natural realism, inspired by the people and terrain of his upbringing, often exotic and even oriental to the Western eye, as tight gatherings of robed musicians and noble elders appear as nomads remote from settler society and steeped in the long vistas and meditative sanity of one broad, earthly embrace. They instill the effect of a healing exhale, yet, he adds a hint of a forewarning in the recurring imagistic device of surveillance equipment to relay the surreal desolations of territorial memory amid the idyllic fantasies of naturalist romanticism.

The neo-impressionist pointillism of Georges Pierre Seurat comes to mind when peering into the breathable life of his realist works, which are deceptively painted with photographic precision when seen from across a gallery room such as at C.A.M., the well-established curatorial space in the storefront arts district of Istanbul's Çukurcuma. In the last decade, moving from upscale Nişantaşı to the downtown nexus of stylish contrasts, Celayir has held four solo shows at C.A.M., a proud champion of his craft. Window shoppers may glance at the one Celayir painting on display for the exhibition that faces the street, the only plain representation of Mount Hesareg, with its chestnut-hued plateau ridge fixed with an abrupt, mixed-media supplement of a striped, orange and white pole, the common eyesore of a construction site. Sadly, the beloved mountain is now serving tourist demands, peopled by skiers and transients without a mind for the vital calling of its inspired atmosphere.

Looking forward to a seminar residency in Berlin in March where he will enjoy the liberty to give vent to such concerns, Celayir has long attracted notoriety in Germany, as with his friend, the art historian Barbara Lipps-Kant, who has written about Celayir for many years. Through his kind sense of humor, he is not shy to confirm that she is related to Immanuel Kant. In the 1980s, still maturing as a fresh transplant in Germany, where he would live for over two decades and gain citizenship, his painting followed certain tendencies born of his new domain. He assumed the intricate and philosophical methods of the *Mischtechnik* (literally, the mix technique), variously conceived by such proponents as Max Ernst and Laurence Caruana among eccentric and uninhibited cultural elites across Europe seeking to fashion a trans-historical image-language from the mythological archetypes of the collective subconscious. Celayir conveyed that dense, pictorial ideology by excavating motifs from the Babylonian, Hellenic and Anatolian civilizations that graced his homeland as in the unconsummated dreams of imaginary temples reaching through the layers of time to surface at the end of his painted brush.

It was not until 1991 when he painted a canvas he titled, *Landscape* that he embarked on a stylistic path that would become his key signature since then and for his most pieces then exhibited at C.A.M. Over the years he has alternated between abstract landscapes to the methodical realism of his earlier direction. Despite formal differences, all are equally derived from his experiences on the land that raised him to return to its sources of wonder and power in blissful, creative union. His process begins in the design of basic patterns of forms, calligraphic, post-literate, often with collages sketched over newspaper shreds and drawn similarly to the texture of his engravings, bound to the natural rhythms that vibrate from Mount Hesareg. In the final stage, he uses color. With titles like *Aramaic Landscape* and *Summer Diaries* he has a writerly conscience, prompted by his asemic experimentation, and his voracious readings into the diverse texts buried in his paint, conveying the loss of literacy, of people, and even of the landscapes he devoutly paints.

In search of the slightest measures of freedom, space is at a premium in his work, as is clearest with his piece, *Region* (in Turkish, *Bölge*), stretching to 450cm wide to evoke his recurring arrangements as the mergence of sky and earth that he has refined since he began painting abstract landscapes. He produced two such works at an art residency on the Aegean coast in

Ayvalik last spring, as his atelier in Istanbul was not large enough. The second piece is off-site a few steps from the Galata Tower in a historic apartment lent to him by a friend, situated in the long-abandoned Levantine neighborhood of the illustrious, all-but-forgotten late Ottoman past. His nine paintings then displayed at C.A.M. explore subtle variations in color. Beside three realist landscapes that have very subdued palettes, he weaves specific color pairings, with overarching spectrums shot through with splotches of red, a symbolic gesture also reminiscent of the works of Syrian painter Ibrahim al-Hassoun.

"Hesareg is a mythic place for me. It has many stories. Everyday in my village, I see that mountain. It is symbolic for me. It has a melancholy background, and brings up memories," Celayir said through his heavy German-Turkish accent, generously sharing the soft light of his natural, artistic brilliance to convey lifelong appreciation for his country beyond the prospects of commerce, and even the need to find work, as he has ever been rapt in the need to express himself and his most abiding experiences in nature as one.

Firstly, what is important is the picture. It has form and color. I don't want to tell stories. For me, paintings must first be paintings, something you enjoy and like, and which is also new. Then, you can discover meaning after that. And it must not be so direct. It must be a little hidden. You have to feel there is something more.

February 17, 11:37 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Trinity

The former railway workshop of the 1920s that later opened as CerModern in 2010 housed train maintenance workshops in stonework sheds under the girth of its industrial gable roofing in the early Republic. The brawny optimism of manual workers in the newly modernizing capital filled the expansive floor as they ducked and turned inside knots of metal bracing that now decorate the illuminated, premier art gallery in Ankara.

In the years before its designated renewal, the building had the eerie look of abandonment, with its cracked windows and weathered exterior since restored to glittering facades befitting a majestic institution made to preserve the unique, creative integrity of the people as they became a modern nation.

In the age of iconoclasts breaking with the past, the idea that art would be bound by time, by a crowd, was unacceptable, an ideology akin to the dogmas of politics, not to a renewal in the techniques and schemes behind painting differently.

From such ways of thinking outside of the box, the d Group liberated itself from prosaic definition. In 1933, its core septet, Abidin Dino, Cemal Nadir Güler, Nurullah Berk, Elif Naci, Zeki Faik İzer and Zühtü Müridoğlu proposed a manifesto to join the ranks of similar decrees on behalf of the chief proponents of nonverbal expression in the unbounded, international society of free expression known as the art world.

The terse nineteen-line piece of writing is stamped about CerModern for the *d Group, again* exhibition. It appears in the display hall where artworks are neatly spaced apart and titled. It shows up in the brochure, catalogue, book and even on the gallery cafe menu.

The manifesto begins like a line from a Chuck Palahniuk novel: "The d Group is not a group." Warmly surreal, the language pairs such images as oxen and photographs, and a mutant being, six-headed, six-eyed, unschooled and decolonized, beyond word and theory, lost to all sense of geography and identity. It is the case for the most influential manifestoes that graced the art world from 1909 to 2012, chronicled in the 2017 book *Why Are We Artists?* by Jessica Lack, that it prompted a creative, metaphorical language to encapsulate philosophies that were in fact only truly evident in visual form, and during especially abstract ventures, not even then.

The d Group named themselves after the fourth letter in the Latin alphabet because they simultaneously affirmed modernist Turkish language reforms while considering themselves the fourth art group to emerge in Turkey, after the Union of Fine Arts (Association of Ottoman Artists), Association of New Painters, and the Independent Painters and Sculptors.

d Group artists were proud of themselves for raising controversy. They criticized academicism and were criticized themselves for practicing aesthetics that reconciled the geometry of Anatolian embroidery with cubism. In the years between 1933 and 1960, as they held seventeen exhibitions

in the midst of popular excitement over the rise of the movement, membership increased. For the *d Group, again* show at CerModern, pieces from twenty-one artists were displayed, ranging from the copper and wood reliefs of Zühtü Müridoğlu to the still life paintings of Salih Nuri Urallı and the cartoon caricatures of Cemal Nadir Güler.

Among the more striking paintings are still those that are plainly realistic, evoking particular scenes as any Romantic canvas would relay its subject pictorially. An example is *Republic Day* by Zeki Faik İzer showing that, while *d Group* artists espoused to have transcended nationalism, they did not shy from depicting its manifestations. And then there are radiantly abstract forms, as in *Antibes, 1955* by Abidin Dino, an homage to French-Russian painter Nicolas de Stael, who died in Antibes in 1955, and is widely esteemed as an abstract painter par excellence. Some of the scenes in the exhibition that depict daily life in Turkey are simply fascinating. *Conversation* by Elif Naci evokes the filmic quality of Anatolian men at odds on opposite sides of the table over unmarked drink.

One particularly alluring painter curated for *d Group, again* is Eren Eyüboğlu, the spouse of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, a household surname in the Turkish art world. Her impressionistic landscapes and cubist portraits have all of the authentic character of the age in which they lived, yet are not dated. She ingeniously captures her time, as in *Yellow Bracelet* of a typically fashionable woman from the year 1930, only with a timeless effect. Later, her piece, *Village Mother* (1954), is arguably one of the best distillations of cubism as a visual philosophy ever painted, where her subject confronts the distortion of her shape against a sharp black line, bent over with a child on her back. She carries the burden of the elementary shapes that the aesthetic deftly renders.

If the English performance artist and sound poet Brion Gysin was right, that writing is fifty years behind painting, then the *d Group* were really onto something when they declared that Turkish painting was fifty years behind painting. For those who drink from a half-empty glass, Turkey is trailing behind behind the Eurocentric taste-making of global contemporary culture by a century. To someone who sees the bright side, Turkish modern art and world literature are synchronized.

The positive observation is curated by project director Fahri Özdemir with historical finesse for the *Colors of Verses* exhibition. In it, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu appears again, left his *d Group* pack for his other life as a writer. The yellowed manuscript of his poem, *Prisons Are Carved from Stone* is framed beside its interpretation as the painting, *my brave my lion lies here* (2017) from Özdemir's personal collection, conceived under the graphically precise hand of İbrahim Örs.

Like most of the paintings in the exhibition it is marked with scrawls of handwritten excerpts from the original literary work. Örs pictured a man sleeping, as one imprisoned, half-naked and ridden with plates of metal below and above, oppressive and lifeless beneath, causing the human form to unravel powerlessly, to assume the artifice of a greatly feared, mechanical demise.

Another irresistible canvas catches the eye for its textural and color contrasts, almost monochromatic in bleak grey and unearthly browns, as the outline of a shapely black-and-white woman disappears into the roughened acrylic, reflective and at peace in the presence of a single rose, whose pink hues and green leaves seem to glow against the stark background. It is *waiting* (2017) by Şahin Demir, set to a piece of writing from 1977 by Cahit Külebi *The East*, also drawn from the personal collection of Özdemir.

Downstairs underneath the main exhibition hall at CerModern, a dedicated gallery called Hub curates the solo show *From the Texture* by Şahin Demir. It welcomes guests with an epigraph from Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat* ending with the uncanny, Symbolist statement: "And at times I have seen what man thought he saw!" Its forty-one paintings are an exhaustive supply of the acrylic imagination, with four of the pieces created in 2018, one month before the exhibition opened in the first week of that February.

The title piece, *From the Texture* is an abstract, non-pictorial exemplification of the recurring technical motif in liberal dabs of paint that appear out of a geological stratum, striped and cut with multicolored engravings of earth tones. His portraits are magically exacting, as they emerge from the effectively charred layers of paint like experienced reality itself surfacing on the outlying, perceptive senses of the mind. Demir is a master of character drawing, as the faces of his subjects, often young women, are torn with emotion as out of the pages of history and into the total mystery of life as it is lived. Mostly immersed in nature, and sometimes nude, he is a surgeon of the female form, placing her body alongside animals in mythical landscapes that fall away from her skin into fading streams of sensual paint.

February 21, 12:14 PM  
Ankara, Turkey

## Cartography

It was a characteristic winter evening in Istanbul as gray skies hovered south from the Black Sea to obscure a rare bout of sunlight in the cold season. The humid air of mid-February thickened between its two seas, the inlet and the strait. A wind chill crept over the steep, urbanized valley forests from the Bosphorus shores.

On the high ground of Tepebaşı, a core district in the city named for its location on the top of a hill overlooking the Golden Horn, the gallery Art On Istanbul opened its elegantly-arched glass door to welcome loyal collectors, collegial curators and fellow artists for the opening of the first solo show by Ahmet Çerkez.

A buyer walked in and immediately seized *Untitled* (2018) -- in fact, all of his pieces are untitled -- a well-composed rust, acrylic and collage on canvas that Çerkez had fashioned sometime within the brief month and a half before the exhibition opened. Its diagrammatic circulation of meshed and haloed patterns distills the central theme of the exhibition *Stateless Maps* with characteristic subtlety and precise technique.

For two years prior to the opening, Çerkez had prepared the pieces that appeared at Art On, which are distinct from his earlier works as they are crafted with a piercing cartographer's eye, as one ruled by a sense of linear direction across conceptual space. His works follow a particular color scheme uniformly based on the cinnamon red of wet rust. It is an aesthetic of urbanization, recalling the pavement-stained oil spill art that Tom Waits designed for the cover of the Winter 2005 edition of *Zoetrope All-Story*, the award-winning literary magazine published by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola.

Art On Istanbul printed textual commentary on the show by Can Özbaşaran, a careful thinker who delved into the likes of John Berger and Katharine Harman's 2009 book *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography* to expound on the exhibition. His insightful words are an intimate look into the inner life of Çerkez as a young artist first exploring his inner life.

After the translation from Turkish by Öykü Özer, he writes, "Çerkez weaves together his story, which he begins to relate using rational lines in a rather unplanned manner, with pieces of his personal experience of immigration at early ages." As a young boy in the 1980s, Çerkez and his family of Balkan Turks left Bulgaria, where they had settled in the Ottoman era. They made the epochal return to Turkey as multigenerational returnees, one of many waves of global migration that followed the rise of modern national borders.

That shared reality is one that Çerkez captures with animating power, as he reconstructs the ingredients of overland journey with materials that give a sense of passing time. Rust, for example, is his staple component, shot through the entire oeuvre of the show, often collaged together with fallen flower petals. In a pair of graphically similar pieces, he evokes the photographic symbol of a solar eclipse, an auspicious metaphor of cyclical time, often marking

the memory of a people, also signaling the anticipation of the future. Many of his works picture organic matter as they appear through the foreground as in the hallucination of a metaphor.

A transparent skull is gridded and splotted with blood-red dyes, almost buried under vegetal shapes while the past is lost to the traumas of forced exile. In another, a black scorpion floats above patterned abstractions, dotted and rounded like the monotonous forms of a settlement, one abandoned by the looming threat of certain death. One in this vein that could be interpreted for its relative optimism is of a plucked leaf, decorated with reverent motifs, which hangs detached, free of twig and branch, tree and root, falling over a pile of flower petals.

The Republic of Turkey, as much as it is an idea of grandeur, is an entity in the world fixed by the pragmatics of reality. Like all things, it exists in relation to its opposite. In that way, modern nations-states are dichotomized by stateless peoples, regardless of political confrontation. The stateless live within official borders and in diaspora. In the authoritative language of international law, migrants and separatists typically encompass alternative narratives beyond that which a nation recognizes as its own, to be taught in schools, fostered among youth and advanced by the people. Yet, there are others. Individually, and informally, artists often speak on behalf of the more marginal of human experiences, those that transcend the normative bounds and rules and conformities of any ideology. The artist is an activist of the soul.

Çerkez represents that classic crossover where historical migrant identity and creative impetus in art are integrated into forms of expression free from the dogmas and impositions of the masses. And yet, the artist of migratory subjects, such as is rendered through figurative abstraction in *Stateless Maps* also represents the human weakness of simply being lost, vulnerable, flung into the unknown where the very earth is unrecognizable. Many questions arise when looking at his canvases. Are these interpretive maps that he has drawn to better understand the new and strange land into which his ancestors immigrated? Is he charting a path within to an otherworldly interior beyond nation-states, even beyond states of mind?

One of his exhibited works particularly conjures the appearance of old, vintage maps from the Age of Exploration in the three centuries following the earliest American colonizations. Its concentric circles are deftly placed to accent the effect of seeing worlds within worlds, drawing from endless cartographies where boundaries overlap and dissolve like his persistent use of corroding metal to signify the impermanence and statelessness of the most enduring of all that is manmade, from construction materials to the ideal of unity. His geometrical outlines detail inhuman visions in which skeletal x-rays and encapsulated cities are shot through with the connecting dots of microchip infrastructures and microcosmic gridlock.

And yet there is a poetic beauty about the whole of his intensive focus. He is a cartographer spinning globes and sweeping dust from waterlogged and molding tomes of faded drawings and broken texts from the furthest reaches of the world, attempting to lodge it all back into his all-too-human mind through study and invention. The art of Çerkez is a wise reminder to all who



despair in confrontation with the deceptively permanent, utterly temporary walls and dams of modern, industrial nationalism.

For one of his larger pieces, he borders a rusty collage of intersecting rectangles with a poem by Emily Dickinson, the antisocial recluse whose verse stands the tests of time and crosses cultures. Özbaşaran quoted the Argentinean poet Juan Gelman, "again we're going to begin all of us / against the great defeat of the world" to capture the underlying sense that identity is malleable, amalgamating with others and dissolving internally like the natural phenomena that often lives and dies unseen where the liminal and stateless coexist on the remote borderlands and in the sprawling heart of the citified modern nation.

February 24, 12:44 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Clockwork

Humanity has been dialoguing about the nature of reality since time immemorial. On record with the emergence of ancient philosophy, from the experiential schools of Vedic India to the rhetorical debates of Classical Greece, it is a constant, persistent source of wonder from then to now as the highest intellectual and spiritual aims of civilization have ever sought to grasp at the line where subjects and objects merge, where the senses meet the world.

The search for truth as the ultimate reality has come into unprecedented confrontation with the technological infrastructure in the nuclear age. From the fires of prehistory to the television set, no one had ever laid eyes on gleaming light for so long other than by the warmth of a stoked flame or under moonlight until the advent of cable. Nowadays, philosophers and all forms of knowledge seekers are bewildered by the rise of such streams of passive, user consumerism as that which cultivates and surrenders to surrealism, neorealism, hyperrealism, photorealism and finally, unrealism.

That more questions arise than are possible to answer in such an adventure of the human soul is a nagging inevitability. While it has dogged those confined to reason, the artists of the world thrive on its core interrogations, plugging away at the catastrophic magic that is cyberspace and its pervasions. Art speaks volumes of the immediate reflections of the present and its cultural norms. If it can be spoken of generally, it is also a tool to develop individual thought and social consciousness, independent of the institutional frameworks in which the more specialized and lofty of the sciences often live and die. From music to painting, the trendiest technological leaps attract the creative mind even in its subtlest, most refined activities. Beyond postmodernism, before Duchamp and Warhol, art served as a means of transcendence for its practitioners, as a refuge from the existential oppressions of culture, society, and identity.

In that way, exhibitions such as *Imaginative Time* at Kare Art Gallery are cathartic in many ways, guiding the twenty-first century wayfarer over a pathless and untraceable field led by multimedia innovators who navigate the prevailing round-the-clock mass immersion into the unreal, virtual, and digital overlaps of sensation filtered through corporatized devices that cover eyes and fill ears to excess. What is seen and heard today by the countless many is largely mediated through the collectives of interconnectivity that double and triple and quadruple in limitless, automated reproduction. The sensations of life are reduced to shadows of figments of mirages of actual, undivided experience. It is a social reality that haunts the art world alike, as the simple importance of standing in front of a live work of art is increasingly lost to its digitization, and to the long-winded opinions of fully computerized commentators who drum up empty talk from a safe distance screens away.

Inside the second floor of the 22 Building along the wide boulevards of Istanbul's classiest quarter of Nişantaşı, the gallery space that has been the home of Kare Art Gallery since 1991 examines the age-old artistic inquisition of worldly truth. The gallery founder and director is Fatma Saka, a veteran Turkish art lover, then in England, where she often appreciates openings at

the Tate Modern. For years, she has been colleagues with the colorful curator Denizhan Özer, advancing the latest, contemporary art movements from around the globe on the frontline of the Turkish cultural establishment. Their exhibition, *Imaginative Time*, is an unflinching, intimate look into the infinitely mirrored wormhole of media, advertisements and computers that have dominated the average person's life more and more in the last hundred years since the rise of commercial radio.

"When you wake up in the morning, automatically you look at social media, check emails. At the same time, the television is on and when you go out there are lots of advertisements. These visions come like layers. When another comes, the first one is forgotten. We are discussing this century from different angles with the artists," said Denizhan Özer, a warm and affable conversationalist with an encyclopedic knowledge of the artists that he has exhibited throughout his career from Mongolia, Korea, and Germany to England and elsewhere.

Serdal Kesgin uses shopping bags and an acrylic mirror so that we see ourselves. When we buy we do not see ourselves. Buying, and buying, and buying and we don't know what we are doing after that. Tansel Türkdoğan, from Ankara, painted images from *Simulacra and Simulation* by Baudrillard, which says: All our life, whatever we see, is a transparent illusion.

Özer is as generous with his thoughts as he is with his time, casually ambling around the gallery space at Kare Art with a refined sense of humor, quick to elucidate on the philosophical background to all of his intuitive curations with his characteristic pragmatism. While it is impossible to speak of the essence of any particular artwork directly, there are endless varieties of avenues by which an eloquent thinker may traverse the gaps between the visual and the verbal, and Özer strolls up and down them with the confidence of his two decades of curating. When he began there were no programs to study art curation, so he first learned to paint.

"Cities are getting bigger and bigger every day. All of these cities have lost their identities. If you look at Ankara, Athens, Oslo, everywhere is the same building, the same Starbucks, the same credit card, the same McDonalds. Before, old cities had their own cultural identity. With modernism, we lost totally all of it. This is *Imaginative Time*," said Özer, explaining a series of works as he moved from *Defense* (in Turkish, *Himaye*) the holographic, lenticular digital print of Murat Gemen to the Mischtechnik painting *Green Area* (in Turkish, *Yeşil Alan*) by Semih Zeki examining the vital points of insights that went into the creation and exhibition of each piece. "We forget nature. We are putting buildings everywhere," he said.

Özer is in demand as an independent curator looking forward to his next exhibition in Istanbul at Kibele Gallery in Levent, while at the same time preparing works for the Venice art fair in Italy to premiere the day after. Since participating in the Çanakkale Biennial, he has attempted to expand *Imaginative Time* into a new biennial in Turkey, to take place in the southeastern Anatolian city of Gaziantep but it's been a hard road as local authorities are weary of contemporary arts funding in an unstable region. He sees every exhibition as a unique, mathematical proof in which various pieces communicate with each other and with the space.

In the case of *Imaginative Time* at Kare Art, the piece *Sanal Manzaralar #011* (in English, *Virtual Landscapes #011*) by Ali Alışır appeared at the gallery entrance, introducing the show from its cloud of the overpopulated multitudes swarming with geometrical interconnections between each individual named and linked and profiled against a looming trail of corporate media logos. Already having worked with everyone before, Özer gathered the artists with a mind for global, social diversity across generations and genders. Works by two Cypriot artists, the storybook comforter of Anger Onar and the photographic documents of Emin Çizenel, detailed the enduring intimacies of the changing times since 1974.

In a stimulating triptych, Polish op artist Monika Bulanda returned to Kare Gallery with a set of visual critiques on commercial portraiture that cleverly swivel interactively as the viewer approaches. Pakistani mixed-media artist Mehwish Iqbal had one of her untitled works on paper, made with techniques in silk screen, calligraphy, etching, and embroidery to relay the effect of delicate human figures bound, tangled in the earthly background in which they are made visible.

"With the development of technology, the progress in communication and the creation of a virtual world, it is no longer easy to talk about reality [...] It is a known fact that the structure of our times, which does not belong to us, leads us to consumerism, directs our social life through virtuality, makes our inner-self void and destroys our system of thought, takes shape over images [...] We encounter images from the time we get up until the moment we go back to bed," wrote Özer in an essay he prepared to coincide with *Imaginative Time*.

How much a person, whose presence changes according to time, exists within synthetic images produced by technology which has a manipulative nature, and how much longer he will survive like this is the greatest question of our times.

February 28, 12:34 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Decolonization

Art speaks for itself. The interpretations of visual history and its criticism are most often composed and explored at a distance, parallel, independent, and sometimes even opposed to the voices that are carried through painting, sculpture, and all of the mediums of expression in which artists live and breathe to create themselves and the world anew. While the higher pursuits of human intelligence would seek to transcend worldly concerns, especially in the finer realms of culture, social realities weigh heavily for contemporary artists.

The virtual limitlessness of media dissemination has prompted a generation of awakened and creative people to respond to the ongoing traumas of the more silent and oppressive past with critical insights into the present. While the global movements spurred by technology are cause for optimism, the unresolved crises of postmodern identity have simultaneously subverted the liberating advantages offered by individualism, ultimately conforming masses of xenophobic loners whose natural capacities to think for themselves and to create with empathy are flooded by unceasing waves of intangible materialism that are as unattainable as they are irresistible.

The very remembrance of history has become an ordeal. Only the more intrepid of old souls break through to enlighten the cultural moment by unshackling the unbroken persecutions of the past from the psychological and utterly real chains locked by the rulers whose sons often still hold the keys, and from the burden of the collective struggle when so many are caught in the depressions of what would appear to elites as mere anachronisms of earlier times.

In an amnesic era, such as the present, everyone assumes multiple histories formed of a variety of untimely and endangered identities. In response to blind pride in society, family, nation and culture that overlook the wrongs of the past, even if unknowingly, the public significance of names and heritages are rightfully questioned by the meritocratic ideals of the secular zeitgeist. Somehow, the antiquated forms of the intolerant and narrow-minded return.

The artists of premodern, imperial Europe were once self-styled documentarians whose realist landscapes of the New World, becoming portraits of royal dignitaries and moralizing scenes of Biblical affairs, had an informing and miseducating effect on the predominantly illiterate people on the ground, who bowed down inside the church and palace before looking up at gravity-defying, awe-inspiring canvases lathered with richly oiled palettes that appeared to be touched with the dreamlike illumination of human class, and divine presence.

Once free of the unsurpassed violence and displacement of two world wars and the suppression of its immediate aftermath, which was disembodied and reformed on the cusp of the avant-garde, the Dada and the surreal, artists gained a new perspective, enlightened by reflexive introspection into the meaning of identity. They questioned the superiority complexes and normative means of belonging to certain places and times, and wondered what it all meant for the world at large. Some questioned whether they were at all. And so, in an era defined by post-war decolonizations,

they felt at liberty to make themselves up again in relation to the change of the times, its upheavals, revolutions, and innovations.

Surges of globalized contemporaries now allow the rediscovery of the inspiration in the significance of premodern history by seeing its most stubborn problems unfinished with the honing of techniques to emphasize the present-day relevance of outdated trends. Among the more determined and awakened of twenty-first century artists is the French painter Raphaël Barontini, whose recent works employ vinyl, rope, silk-screen, ink and acrylic to convey his divisive ancestral consciousness through a series of visual metaphors: the black face, the slave ship, the African sculpture, the imperialist portrait. *Tapestry From An Asteroid* is his first solo show in Turkey, which he titled to encompass a span of time that is as retrospective as it is forward-thinking.

"Raphaël defines himself as a painter, but he likes to explore the boundaries of painting. He is known for his textile pieces, which remind you of the sails of big ships. He's very concerned with colonialism, post-colonialism, the heritage of blackness in painting and the reputation of black people in painting, which he finds very lacking in the history of art," said Suela Cennet, a young and charming French curator, who returned to her Turkish roots to found and direct The Pill, a contemporary gallery exhibiting internationally renowned artists in the mixed neighborhood of Balat, which is traditionally home to minorities.

His typical aesthetics are assemblages of forms and symbols, close to the Dada movement formally speaking. He'll mix those cultural heritages, European, with others from Africa, pre-Columbian civilizations, and he will create his own library of symbols and hybrid characters. He's interested in portraiture, because it was for a long time reserved to privileged people.

As a Frenchman from Saint Denis with Caribbean and Italian roots, Barontini is rewriting art history by fusing the elements of disparate cultural heritages, from Nigerian masks to the paintings of Velasquez, he crosses the deeply polluted oceans of contemporary race relations with the intuitive direction of his personal odyssey.

When entering The Pill, his most immediate piece is *Barque solaire* (2017), translated from the French, literally, as Solar Boat. It has a two-faced resonance, as the halved face and penetrating eyes of its subject, a black man, trains his piercing stare over the doorway to the former generator factory. Until the end of the exhibition, the many and diverse visitors from the neighborhood and across Eurasia are drawn to the spacious, white gallery with the invitation to walk around the first tapestry, to see a negative of a plushly-outfitted European aristocrat in his decadent ruff printed on the back of the fabric.

"Behind the black face you have the actual portrait. The installation was meant to be an island somewhere on another planet, in your imagination. There is an invocation of an odyssey, of a long trip. You have to discover the paintings from different angles," said Cennet, standing under

his largest-ever textile piece, the title work of the exhibition, *Tapestry From An Asteroid*, which stretches 1000cm-wide over an accumulation of black sand.

For him, it's always about what it means to be a painter today, where images and techniques are all over the place. He has been shaped by his identity issues.

Cennet and Barontini curated the exhibition together. Although new in the neighborhood since opening only two years ago to show Turkish and international artists, The Pill has developed a unique reputation by immersing Syrian youth around the corner, who had never seen contemporary art, and the upper echelons of the Istanbul art world in the French scene, such as in recent inaugural solo shows by Elsa Sahal and Eva Nielsen.

In a city where the museums and cultural establishment have been influenced for the last decade mostly by Germany and England, the Paris-based, French postcolonial, Afro-punk attitude of Barontini offers a tantalizing contrast. From the biennials of Bamako and Thessaloniki to acquisitions for LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and leading French museums, his name is soaring to worldwide prestige, comparable to the regal figures that he visualizes with sharp critique.

The imposing sound design by NYC-based musician and poet Mike Ladd is a double-track cycle, *Solar Drums* and *Odyssey* that bears down over the gallery floor like an apocalyptic wind storm of divine vengeance recorded from the slaving coasts of Africa to the parading streets of Guadeloupe. It is a device that Barontini employs with recurring cinematic effect in his exhibitions, as synth drives and percussive booms sweep into the air with the dramatic force of a Caribbean carnival climaxing in full swing.

Akin to the color field painting and lyrical abstractionism of Sam Gilliam, his key style is distilled in acrylic gradient and silk-screen fusions that he accents with action drips over interchanging African, European and creole aesthetics, where faces, bodies, clothes, colors merge, spark, materialize and disappear.

March 3, 11:55 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Horticulture

The way to the latest artworks by Selim Birsal leads to something of a direct experience with the first line from Finnegans Wake. It begins at the bottom of a street that once coursed with the runoffs of flowing valleys and waterfront bluffs descending to the turquoise marine nexus of the Bosphorus strait, the Golden Horn inlet, and the Marmara Sea.

As the quasi-blind Irish writer James Joyce once joked with quips of the pen, "Riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay..." To his most noted scholars, his stream-of-consciousness prose poem, likened to *The Disconnected* by Oğuz Atay, is a cyclical map that charts a path to realize the metaphor of Eden, that garden of perfection where the original man and woman fell into time, modernity, history, what Freud called *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

In September, the cafe riverrun opened atop two floors, all entirely devoted to the purposes of literature, art, and every sense of community that fosters independent creativity and vibrant individuality, a mode of being that is as increasingly rare as it is essential. A trusty barista named Buğra serves some of the city's finest imported blends of filter coffee beans from Ethiopia, Burundi and Colombia as he airs folk and rock classics from a generation past. The ambiance of musical and literary lore rises from an enviable store of modern classics in translation beside stacks of exquisite vinyls that prompt a self-education in counterculture.

The owner, Alpagut Gültekin, is also publisher of Norgunk editions and sometimes emerges from an office in the chic building that stands out for its sleek, novelistic storefront in historical Tophane neighboring the old Italian district.

During a blustery chill on a March evening, Gültekin welcomed usual faces and curious newcomers with a steady grin to *The Art of Garden Care*, the third exhibition opening at Bunker, the gallery space beneath riverrun that began with a prestigious show by Bernard Frize and Ayşe Erkmen. In 2015, he inaugurated his current pair of ventures in contemporary art by opening Ariel Sanat with his wife Ayşe Orhun inside the classy Narmanlı vintage apartment building in Teşvikiye uptown. There is a signature aesthetic in boldfaced, black-and-white accents throughout the sleek, small-scale entrepreneurial link that is as visible in each book design at Norgunk as it is immersed in the interior decor and art curations from top to bottom at riverrun.

Selim Birsal, the Brussels-born installation artist who launched his exhibition career in Turkey at Ataturk Cultural Center (AKM) in 1991, works with the color and texture of the Bunker space. In contrast to his duo show with Sinan Logie at Ariel Sanat, his series for *The Art of Garden Care* is intensely personal. Entering the Bunker space, the effect is like walking into the strange, half-neglected garden of a distant friend whose ambitions seem awkwardly out of tune with his immediate reality. He is in search of a wholly unique perspective and in the process his every perception is a stretch. Such an attitude fits the nominal theme of the exhibition, namely to visualize the domestication of nature and to rethink what it means to be a misbegotten steward to other intelligent life forms.



The ancient practice of horticulture, or simply gardening, alters both nature and humanity. It represents one of the earliest leaps in artificial technology, transforming the social identity of the peoples it impacts along with the surrounding ecology, an advance thinly akin to the digital communications of today. It was conceivably the cutting-edge in prehistoric eras, and in many respects its timeless advantages are still at the forefront of food security and biotech issues.

Across cultures gardening has a popular lure for its mixture of informality and habit. For millions of hobbyists alone, it is often more a cathartic mess of a joy than a severe discipline. The style in which people garden speaks to how they approach life. In southern Mexico, for example, gardens of German-speaking Hutterite colonists are prim and lined, whereas neighboring indigenous Mayan communities harvest from patches that look more like untended overgrowth.

Selim Birsal arrived to riverrun the day before his solo opening to finalize the installation, making it appear as if he had left it unfinished and neglected. He had selected twenty-two of his photographs taken from various international sites in the years of 2004-2017, comprising a series titled "The Abandoned Ones" that blends into *Garden Installation* (2018) as two of the plexiglass and Dibond mounts are simply left on the floor, where they lean against the wall that is coincidentally painted in the same silvery hue as the colorless prints.

One is even about face, with only the artist's signature, date and title visible. Another is merely an empty frame, and the perimeter is a mashup, somewhat characteristic of Birsal's history of scattered objects, as in his *Arguments* (1996) piece for the David Ben Ari Museum in Israel. There are question marks everywhere. Reams of white paper stacked by the cutout of a human figure, a blackboard and single piece of chalk, an archaic cellphone plugged in to charge. Whorls of interconnected plates stand upright against a corner aside a bass guitar with its amplifier switched on for the sonic delights of passersby with an itch to strike a chord. He strew fragments of sliced zinc across the floor under one piece of it that is roughly etched and hanging beside the photographs to highlight the metallic origins of the medium.

At a glance, the installation and photos are as decontextualized and out of place as a gardener in the middle of a city square. *The Art of Garden Care* is an intimate trespass into the private property of the artist's creative interior, now exposed as he has conceived land use patterns with a mind for emphasizing the idea of a garden as a figment of time. He has refined and broadened its designs, utilities, constructs, and settings within the narrative arc of his work over the years. When seen from the vantage point of his past installations, *The Art of Garden Care* makes sense within its internal logic. There is a method to the madness of his focus on natural dereliction and the outcast landscapes of post-human impact.

In his 2002 book, *Over and Beside the Works* there are clear lines of continuity in *The Art of Garden Care* from his introductory steps as an exhibiting artist back when he covered the floors of a room at the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg with various spices for *Spice Main* (1990) and etched geometrical shapes into preexisting tiles for his *The Shadow of...* (1993) piece in

Taejon, South Korea. Inserting an epigraph after the title page to his tightly bound saga, he conveyed the iconoclastic wisdom of singer Jim Morrison: "I prefer a feast of friend to the giant family." It encapsulates the personality and humor of Selim Birsal.

Despite being an accomplished artist with much of his reputation etched permanently into the Turkish and European pantheon of contemporaries, he still searches earnestly in the obscurest, nameless corners of creation to express visions of individual consciousness. As aloof and unpredictable as a remote, eccentric horticulturalist, he is not one for crowds.

While circled by a proud gathering of admirers, friends, family, colleagues, students, he stole away at every possible opportunity to sit at the cafe with an acquaintance, preferring one-on-one, face-to-face conversation beyond the flood of greeting etiquette that seemed nothing more than senseless and impersonal habits of repetition. He gravitated to street level for a cup of coffee.

Among the rows of books surrounding him was one of his, "News Impressions." It is part of an ongoing series that he will continue in coming weeks at a workshop Cyprus, where he photographs daily life into a conceptual news feed. Norgunk is slated to publish a forthcoming volume on his contemporary practices. Yet, on the night of his opening, he was delightfully elusive, careful not to reveal any of his magic tricks. He quietly removed himself from the gallery, ultimately sharing in the company of the academic Lewis Johnson, his longtime writerly-accomplice that he has known since his professorship at Bilkent in the 1990s.

In brief moments, he would clarify points from *The Art of Garden Care*, such as the importance of having a sound element. He reminisced on former days playing bass and singing. Birsal is authentic in that he not only means what he says, he is what he says, even when he speaks mostly through the silence of pure visuals. "My work is like words," he wrote, as posted at riverrun between the cafe and gallery floors.

Obviously, the world is not a rose garden, but deep inside I always maintain some hope, some positive spirit. Pointing to the traces of despair, I am maintaining the hope and light in me. [...] I produce my work for myself before anyone else. Then I share the emotional and rational interaction through an exhibition or performance.

March 7, 10:18 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Ecology

On casual, weary weekday mornings in Istanbul, the slim, the industrial doorway to Co-Pilot opens at the edge of the stylish Cihangir district leading uphill to Taksim Square. Its spacious basement loft houses Pilot Gallery in an auxiliary space awaiting the renovation of its street-level storefront for downtown window shoppers to gaze into its transparent facade and admire some of the finest curated art in the city.

The artist Elmas Deniz emerges into the light of day before overcast winter grays are cleared by fiery rays of sunlight warming the coastal ecology in an atmosphere of early spring. It's been a while since she last exhibited, four years since her last solo show, and she needs a breath of fresh air, a strong tea, a meeting with someone new. She has an infectious smile, and converses with the familiar cool and open kindness of an old friend.

Over brick-red Turkish tea she speaks freely, quick to vent about all of the problems that she has had with the arts establishment in Turkey in the past two decades and then some, and how she has in the past, at times even abstained from joining the ranks of her exhibiting artist peers at work in Istanbul. In the great Bosphorus megalopolis, she has endured defining changes in citywide art world trends from group to solo shows in the course of her sixteen years active in and out of the scene, mainly exhibiting in Istanbul while often taking up residencies abroad, from Pakistan to Denmark, with a most recent venture to Sri Lanka.

She decided to plunge headfirst again and work in the system that consistently disappoints with its corrupted values and incurable exploitations. While she does not identify as a medium-based artist, *A Year Without Summer* was then her first exhibition since 2003 and in it she shows her talent and love for painting with her two canvases, *Raven Portraits* (2018). Its six pieces revolve around her artist book, *Flying Plants, Dogs and Elephants* (2017) and a six-minute video, *Made to be seen* (2017) that she produced in Sri Lanka with the support of SAHA.

As a young girl growing up in the holiday seascapes around Izmir, she describes her childhood as a time of mischievous fun, when she was one of the dark-skinned ragamuffins who wile away the hours jumping in and out of the gleaming Aegean coast when not pestering freeloaders and sunbathers to abandon. It was there and then when she learned to immerse herself in nature, to bask in its liquid joys with a sunny disposition and critical mind liberated against the rushing tides of postcolonial globalization that seeks to consume and sell the world for its beauty, regardless of its integrity as the source of all life.

From the ancient ports and lush shorefronts of Izmir, she began her arts education at Izmir Anatolian Fine Arts High School and soon after at Dokuz Eylül University of Fine Arts, blossoming within ten years as she became an empowered creative individual expressing herself as the essence of her art foremost before the works that materialize through her hands from and through practically anything.

*A Year Without Summer* begins with the artist's collection of seeds from citrus and carob plants boxed in an elegant, smooth frame of wood, and lit to the effect of a precious rarity. And it is a fair presentation, seeing as how she gleaned the seeds from heirloom varieties, an order of biodiversity that is increasingly threatened by the engineered reproduction and regulated trade behind the world's globalized food industries. The piece is titled *Unsellable Artwork* in the tradition of Warhol's soup cans, as she utilized the context of the art gallery to examine popular perceptions of nature in relation to commercial space. Once placed in a purely aesthetic light, the value of the material changes. It gains new meaning. Finally, it is seen, recognized and most importantly, preserved.

"I was planning to seed them somewhere. Without a certificate, it is now forbidden to sell these seeds between people, the very ancient and local varieties. I am playing with the idea of art material for trade in a gallery setting," said Deniz, as she frequents organic markets in Turkey and on her travels, lately while in the Sri Lankan capital for the multidisciplinary arts festival, Cinnamon Colombosepe, where she found inspiration in paper made from elephant dung among other peculiar interests.

It's a great exhibition for English speakers because I produced works abroad in English and brought them here. *Flying Plants, Dogs and Elephants* is an artist book silk-printed in only two copies for the show. I wanted people to read it in the exhibition not at home, to see the book not as an object. I write about hugging stray dogs, not petting, really hugging.

Elmas has an understated sense of humor as she conveys her relationship to the natural world with a cool-headed intelligence. She treats plants and animals with a refined dignity and blissful respect, as for a wise king, or a happy child. Her storytelling is printed in spare, crystal-clear prose, sometimes only a single, economic sentence a page, to chronicle her thrills as a woman in love with life, a naturalist romantic for the contemporary age of sky-high urbanization.

"There is a '1 m2' area that we do not leave," she inked over the rustic elegance of the page unfinished with multi-hued textures of vegetal matter. "We are on the ground now." To her, sinking down to the level of a street dog for a tight and long embrace is a dance.

Her passion then transforms into technical language, as she outlines *Transport Guidelines* for moving live plant material across international borders, drawn from CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). It's all part of her charming wit as an artist-environmentalist with a literally dogged empathy demonstrating the basis of creativity in life and its beings. That reverence lifted her spirits enough to return to the canvas with a paintbrush, as her *Raven Portraits* assert the immemorial prestige and penetrating cleverness behind the visage of the fabled black bird. She glorifies the feathery bust and avian features into profiles of quirky magnetism and luminous attraction.

"After we left Africa, as a species, we needed to create life support. We don't have an immediate relation with nature, especially with animals. We don't observe animals anymore. That's

delegated to scientists. We get information from news. It's an indirect relation," said Deniz as she stood in front of her series of *Raven Portraits* beside delicately lit, letter-pressed acrylic canvases, *Ravens have a theory of mind, says scientists* (2018) imprinted with a nineteenth century, Poe-like literary aesthetic.

Everything is anthropocentric, related to us, not with the animal really. Ravens know that others have intelligence. It's another level of intellect.

The earliest works at *A Year Without A Summer* are a diptych of framed plastic bags, one biodegradable, the other not, titled *Mistakes* (2015). It is part of a line of thought that she adapted for her contribution to the 14th Istanbul Biennial, a piece called *Under the Panorama* in which she reimagines the Bosphorus as the top layer sandwiching a plastic bag between seafloor sand and the iconic aquatic cityscape. Welded by her brother, her sculptural design, *Greenhouse for Nothing* (2018) is a windowed iron frame housing a bit of soil, as she laments the lack of natural light in most gallery spaces while aspiring to install ethically-sound exhibitions of living organisms in future works.

Finally, the gallery centerpiece *Made to be seen* (2017) explores the jungle preserves of Sri Lanka, its exotic and dangerous biota that gives and takes life with all of the commonplace routine of a changing season. Narrated in the deep, unaffected voice of Lara Ögel, it is like a travel ad in slow-motion, bent with the thoughtful sarcasm of Deniz, a writer and artist inspired by the deep ecology of the planet in relation to her life, as one human who is fully being.

March 9, 3:29 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Water

"By the waters of Babylon," reads the 137th Psalm, "there we sat down, and wept, when we remembered Jerusalem." It is one of the most universal and deeply cherished of biblical extracts, gaining literary and musical appreciation down the ages, from its Iron Age scribe, King David of Judah, to the Jamaican reggae artist Jimmy Cliff.

In its language are insights into the concept of water memory, a proposal forwarded by researchers Masaru Emoto and Jacques Benveniste whose findings rocked the scientific community in the last decade of the twentieth century, from United States Department of Defense funding to the editorial establishment of the leading popular science journal *Nature*.

It also inspired waves of renewed environmental consciousness around the world. People simply looked at water differently. They no longer saw clear through the liquid essence of life to inspect it for contamination, or to gaze above its surface to see themselves reflected in glimpses of the passing moment. Instead, they went closer, and saw that the water itself had remembered, lived, even thought.

The artist and curator Seyhan Musa explores these themes for the sequel to her exhibition trilogy at Orjin Sanat titled *Water* by similarly relating ancient wisdom, only a few centuries down the line to the initial front of Western enlightenment. She cited Aristotle's musings on the faculty of memory as akin to producing materialist impressions in wax, a metaphor pointing to the intellect's basic divorce from reality.

Before artificial media, the senses in relation to objects were enough to prompt debate about the nature of perception by what is essentially a nervous filtration system. Now that such mirrors within mirrors are developed to sheer infinity, the gravity of unanswered questions tempts society through a black hole, plunging thoughtlessly despite the natural world or any authentic search for what is real.

"When we say *Water* it's not actually only about water. I'm taking it as a metaphorical context for its conceptual worth. It's mainly based on the water memory theory. It's directly related to memory and how that's built, but also how it's received in the context of an art exhibition," said Musa, while sitting after hours in the clean, spacious corporate gallery that she has transformed into a place for the new global youth expressionism.

And *Water* takes that as its form, its qualities, the fact that it is fluid, flowing. It could be clear. It could be dirty. There's something poetic about water memory theory, thinking about the element as an emotional landscape. I'm trying to underline the choice of medium. I believe that video, or photography, or video shows can then be understood more.

Musa is an intuitive, philosophical curator, also an exhibiting artist at her show, *Water*, held in the uptown sprawl far from her funky Space Debris in the core port neighborhood of Karaköy,

where she has hosted art exhibitions, live performances and sound experiments for the last four years between New York and Istanbul. As is true for all opposites, remembering is defined by forgetting. The unprecedented capacity that every individual has to remember, to record any and every instant of audiovisual experience with the personal gadgetry of consumer trends has come to a completely new historic convergence.

The processes, individual and collective, through which memories are stored and revealed have fundamentally altered. The immemorial traditions of art and storytelling have become lost to the all-consuming tides of isolating and ego-inflating digitization.

In mid-January of 2018 she launched the first part of her exhibition trilogy, *Noise* as a Digital Festival with haydiroket inspired by the MIT Press book, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Voice, Sound, and Aurality in the Arts* by Douglas Kahn. In the process, she has since revolutionized the underground art gallery at Orjin Maslak, which formerly conformed with the building's underlying aesthetic of modernist commercialism. It became a place of higher contemplations born of the emerging generation of artists who are as aloof from the lines of worldly rationalism as they are free of the dizzying illusions of urbanism that are subconsciously led in mass opposition to sustainable, creative life.

*Water* is a response to that prevailing milieu, an exercise in nonlinear thought drawn from the sources of being and creation that the artist frequents, both physically and spiritually. Its progression, from the intangibles of her initial curations for the Digital Festival *Noise* featuring tech-art hyper-submersed through everything from GIFs to tablets, and television monitors, *Water* is a more sensual exhibition, some might say more real, although still semi-solid and flowing, mainly through the mediums of photography and video. The final installment, a forthcoming exhibition to be titled, *Meat* will consist of paintings and sculptures.

As the Sufi poet, Mevlana Rumi wrote in his thirteenth century poem cycle, the *Mesnevi*: "Know, the moon is in the sky, not in the creek's reflection!" Musa leapt from classical Greece to the contemporary global village bounded by the technologies of collective memory. Her inspiration is drawn from the deep well of Platonic ideals, as one of the earliest theories that all intellectual knowledge is based in material forms. For example, water is not only important for its physicality, but also for the ideas and metaphors that it represents.

"People think they don't understand contemporary art, but for the last show all that they had to do was look, or for this one as well, but they think there is something else that they need to read into it. I try to show these different mediums, to ask why we choose them," said Musa, an earnest pioneer and creative entrepreneur, leading and persevering in the independent, nonprofit sector of the arts in Turkey.

Here, photography and video talks about that remembrance, because when we actually recall a memory we're recalling it from where it's stored in our brain, and the last time it was saved. Once

you actually recall it again, you're building it from the last time you remembered. So, it actually constantly changes.

The five-minute video work, *Tear of the Clouds* (2013/2015) by the Montreal-based Melis Bürsin is a centerpiece to the exhibition, projected on its largest wall facing the passersby who descend from the high tower of offices, and through the bowels of the food court above to glance, even for a moment, into a world where the shape of things merges into the universal, and timeless principles from which they emerge, and to where they remain. Bürsin is represented by Musa's downtown venue Space Debris, and her exhibited video is something of a mixed-form abstraction of a visual document reenacting in a nonlinear narrative her three-day journey to the sacred place where the Hudson River begins, deep within the kaleidoscopic hills of the Adirondacks that sound with the indigenous music of upstate New York, a far cry from the city.

In many ways parallel to Bürsin, the Kentucky-born photographer Christian Hansen traveled to the Idyll Dandy Arts rural community land project where gender-fluid artists form new relationships to each other and the art practices they have honed within themselves. He pictures them as they are together, as in a natural state, unclothed and wading lazily over a churning forest creek. From there, roaming eyes would land on a lightly translucent color video projection of the Seine, to hear the sound of the street, a busking jazz musician harmonizing with the rippling river in the form of a mixed-media collage diptych installation by Zeynep Birced titled, *Possibilities* and *Over the Clouds* (2015/2017). Its dualistic motifs recur throughout the exhibition, as in the photographs of Louisa Marie Summer, the paper designs of Ayça Telegren and the collaborative double exposures of Katie Nadworny and Alison Luntz titled *DreamSpace 1 & 2* (2017), unifying the cityscapes of Istanbul and New York City with a mystic aura.

And curator Musa herself created to such an effect with her *Melankolik Chaotic Raptures* (2012-2015). Its two minutes and fifty seconds of color video and sound from where she grew up in the buildings of Erenköy before they were demolished, to the tenements of South Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where she lived and breathed as a performing artist. Her work is as haunting as it is moving, as the frame itself nearly faints as one drowning, breathless in a civilization swept in the flood of its terminal outpouring, hitting bottom and gasping for air.

The voice of Musa is heard, softly against the handheld sequence of intimate videography, a diary of her life in moments of solitude as she has moved across continents, her message as in a bottle drifting on the high seas. She whispers, as to herself:

At times I feel like this. I feel a deep melancholy. It makes me feel uneasy inside. I try to close my eyes and focus on my breathing, hoping that it would get back to normal. I start impinging my hands touching cold marble or cement, feeling the breeze, looking at the view, the gray waters [...] When we cry after something is lost we know that what we have lost has become nothing. So now I'm sitting here thinking. Have I turned into nothing?

March 12, 11:59 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Overground

As winter gives way to the rains of early spring the gray sky still seems endless. Skyscrapers are like glass giants, rising from the valley horizon peopled with the huddled and trudging who see the day through, one at a time. Individuals are dwarfed under behemoth industry that possesses the air and the earth. Roads are slick and wet, sharply ascending against columns of government-built factory projects, where mechanics toil over the combustion pistons, turbines, nozzles, blades, grinding gears, lubricating the engines that drive the city into its amassing commotion.

From the columns of steel that split the clouds, to the nuts and bolts of a junked car, the inner reaches of Maslak are as real and immediate as Istanbul gets for its locals, and by chance, for the occasional wayward wanderer curious enough to trace its pathless clutter of unplanned and misconceived urbanization through to the rooftop alleyways of bare and crude warehouse exteriors above ground-level auto garages. Inside its inexpensive studio spaces, a quiet movement is growing to the effect of freedom for even the most accomplished and worldly of Turkish artists to create, unburdened by financial ties and the glaring spotlight of globalized gentrification and its discontents.

To celebrate twenty-five years at her gallery, which she charmingly named after her initials, Pg, the spirited and young-souled gallerist Pırıl Güleşçi Arıkonmaz recently set up shop behind one of the many nondescript facades at the Maslak Auto Industrial Zone, a metal doorway painted over with the same matte black as its outside entrance wall.

At number 169, it is accessible walking up a fragmented parking ramp on either side of Street 6. Its ambiance has an offbeat draw, akin to the literary imaginations of J.G Ballard, or Phillip K. Dick, with its post-futurist atmospheres, at home in the existential nausea and uninterrupted now, where contemporary thinkers and artists transcend history and realize the timeless importance of human invention at its source, deep within in the interiors of the creative world, where all that is made is first unmade, and all that is unborn is felt. The rest of society blinks and misses it.

To most, it was a common Thursday afternoon in early March when a dreary rain pattered over tin roofs and vehicle windows, soaking somber stray cats and hardening the look in every workmen's eye. With a simple knock beside a tricolored butterfly design in pointillist graffiti, seconds passed in the watery silence of the falling sky. All at once, another world opened. If the storybook fantasy of J.M. Barrie had a place on earth, then Pırıl would be its Wendy. And like the fairy tale fictions of Peter Pan's affection, she is real, while embracing all that is fleeting about the silver anniversary that she then enjoyed with her gallery's eclectic community.

As she admits, she may get bored of the whole business before then. Although she publicizes the initiative as the Pg Popup Gallery she explains that it is not really a popup exactly, instead categorizing it as more of an experimental hybrid of fashion, design and art taken from her bewilderingly and byzantine array of collections and acquisitions that she has brought together

into a room and a compact upstairs attic loft for her private fête that began with the idea for a book and since bloomed into an experimental fanfare of a space.

By the looks of her, the past two and half decades have passed with more thrills than chills as she entertains to tradition, surrounded by elegant company: an architect, a jeweler, a sculptor, a painter, a critic, and all nameless varieties of eclectic characters and innovators, freethinkers and globetrotters who grace her very enviable and complimenting presence. Pırıl is a diamond who embraces the rough and polishes it to a glimmer. She has all of the classic bravura of a mad lover of life, one not softened by luxury, only stimulated by it to the point of intoxication under the exhale of the muses. Her curatorial enthusiasm for what is unique, valuable and truly beautiful flirts with the trends and sends them howling in new directions.

A woman named Berna smiled beside her, proud as sunlight, as she beamed remembering the twenty-four-year-old Pırıl crashing the scene in the stylish highs of Bebek in 1993, when and where she first opened her gallery. Pearled, cheerful as a longtime family friend, Berna reminisced with eyes moistening, her heart visibly soft with admiration and joy at seeing the young lady she knew grow to such a refined woman of cultivated prestige. Her opening years were bright, as she held recurring shows by some of the most famous names in contemporary Turkish art, whose reputations have since been emblazoned into a pantheon of cultural innovation; Şenol Yorozlu, Tayfun Erdoğan, Kezban Arca Batıbeki, Günnur Özsoy. The latter's sculptures are hung liberally to accent plush, designer furniture over luxuriously comforting fur rugs in her DIY anniversary space. It is a point that she emphasizes with the weight of her experience, that it is necessary for young, new galleries to show works by artists of note.

A select gathering joined around Berna and Pırıl for impromptu discussions as they held space in honor of Pg Art and its gaining influence as a platform for artists to both reach high-stakes collectors, and more, to enjoy what all artists dream, aspiring to that certain liberation that comes with the coveted representation of a gallery with the power and resources to support truly outlandish work, such as that which broadens public perspectives well beyond the status quo of monetized definition. That is where Pırıl shines, with her gift for seeing and showing art that balances ever so carefully along the lines of artistic innovation and up marketability as she braves such risks.

The artist Ekin Saçlıoğlu arrived from her studio only a short walk away. She had been spending her time in preparation for a new show at Gallery Nev in Ankara. In the corner next to the sofa were her sculptural works, given to Pırıl for her anniversary space. For about a decade, Ekin was represented by the gallery x-ist in Istanbul before becoming independent. Her art practice raises eyebrows over the briefest of conversations, as she assumes a cool appearance that would never lead one to guess that she shapes fossils into metallic miniatures that gleam with evolutionary fantasies. She did not introduce herself to everyone, calmly seating herself at the central table as people slowly did the same for late afternoon repose, immersed in a peculiar state of mind, relishing in the inclusive aesthetic taste that Pg has sustained with her special brand of color and humor over the years.

And then the globally-renowned sculptor of stone monuments Kemal Tufan entered like the crashing of cymbals, as Pırıl lit up to echo the praise of a man whose stars have become a constellation to her and to the world. Represented by Pg for some twenty years, fellow sculptor Ayla Turan accompanied him into a rush of collective festivity. She then moved about the room with spontaneous euphoria, enlightening her listeners with her intuitions on works that are practical and salable, yet utterly original.

With contagious excitement, she presented glistening barware by Felekşan Onar, electric drawings by Mehmet Kuran, textile abstractions by Liz Collins, the cyclical paintings of Emre Namyeter and a tailor-made piece by Biricik Suden. If that was not enough, she has added recent personal acquisitions, including the conceptual woodwork of Umberto Dattola, whose art has prompted her participation in Milan Design Week.

She could not resist, and it is this irresistibility that she attracts and sends out to the world from one relatively obscure corner of Istanbul, surrounded by her closest circle, welcoming impressionable newcomers. Tufan, a man responsible for mammoth mineral displays from Korea to Egypt to Chile disappeared across the alley through his studio door, as another, younger sculptor, Kagan Toros, emerged from another heavy door a few steps away, his skeletal works backlit as he sauntered into the Neverland that will always have been Pg.

March 19, 9:25 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Eastward

In a self-portrait dated 1575, the artist Melchior Lorck has the look of an emperor, only with double bags under his eyes, which seem softer than that of a ruler. His facial hair is wavier, freer and less rigid than his royal superiors. He stares to the right with a profile of dignity, his neck shawled in something of a toga befitting his Renaissance contemporaries at the onset of the Enlightenment; inspired to create neoclassical masterpieces for the next three centuries.

While serving as honorary guard in a company of archers under Danish King Frederick II, Lorck drew inspiration for his life's work from the ancient, imperial capital at the eastern edge of Europe that was shrouded in the mysteries of its names, Mickelgarth to the Vikings, Constantinople to the indigenous Greeks, the Sublime Porte to the romantic French and Konstantiniye to the ruling Muslims.

Originally from the German town of Flensburg where the Danish minority still carries the traditions of the mother tongue, Lorck lived during a time when to have Danish heritage was to stand among the most powerful in Western Europe as its civilization spread to Iceland and Norway and as far as Estonia, with Greenland being its remaining extraterritorial legacy.

Henrik Ibsen, a nineteenth century playwright comparable to Shakespeare in importance for fathering realism and modernism in theater, wrote and published his plays in Danish, then the common language of his native Norway. And as the dominant European culture that would come to be known as the West enjoyed its incipient global rise, visionaries like Lorck captured the apex of cultural development in late Islamic civilization as it bore fruit under Sultan Süleyman, who he apparently saw and engraved for a portrait in 1559, the last year he spent in the Ottoman Empire before leaving for Vienna.

It had been a charged four years for him there, despite nearly half of it spent in confinement as he drafted fellow foreigners and rooftops from a narrow window in the German outpost, fashioned as a caravanserai.

By the time Lorck made the engraving of Süleyman, the sultan was already known as the Magnificent in the West and the Lawgiver to his imperial subjects in the empire with respect to his poetics of strategy as a sensitive legislator. He was said to be the most humanist sultan among the Ottomans, living most of his life aligned to a finer, more artistic resonance beyond that of the violent glories of Mehmed the Conqueror and the expansionist dreams of Osman I.

In 1559, when Süleyman met Lorck, his greatest accomplishments were behind him, writing verse under an alias to his favorite wife, his "one and only love" while supporting poetry and the arts in Turkey with peerless dedication. Lorck's portraiture covered his ambassadorial entourage, including one early travel writer, Flemish herbalist and diplomat Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq.

In the last months of his diplomatic service, Lorck was busy drawing everything from the ranks and nationalities of the Ottoman army to the dress and customs of society while documenting ancient and modern monuments across the empire, many of which are now lost, such as the fifth century Arcadius Column long destroyed by an earthquake, its vividly detailed reliefs once outlining the Roman defeat of the Goths.

Lorck's magnum opus was a drawing on twenty-two sheets called *The Prospect of Constantinople* (c. 1562), the first of many panoramic works of the city that would reach the West, defining Constantinople as an essential, global nucleus of perennial intrigue and fascination. Even then, Constantinople's level of construction was mammoth, its heights splendid with geometric fantasy, and Lorck represented it in the scale of his 1,145-centimeter-long topographic drawing that redefined art, as it did popular perception of the greater world when he finished it the year he met the sultan.

In its lower right corner is his initial self-portrait, although he is about face, standing from the Galata tower where so many today peer out over the floating horizon to spy the remnants of two vanquished empires. One almost sees the smoking rubble still rising where he saw the dust settle as it began to collect. For his 1575 self-portrait, his worn face shows the stress lines that must have come with his petitioning for royal finances for the project that would seal his fame in art history, a series of one hundred and twenty eight surviving woodcuts and writings known as *The Turkish Publication*. In a twist of mystery, its realization is mixed in his untimely disappearance.

Before his unexplained death, he painted a full-length portrait of King Frederick II in 1581, a piece that represents the earliest work of its kind in Danish art. As is clear during a walk through the National Gallery of Denmark in Copenhagen, elite portraiture would define trends in creative patronage for Danish artists for the next three centuries, as it did throughout Europe.

Aside from the portrait of Mahmud Agas, ambassador of Tripolis, painted by Carl Gustaf Pilo in 1757, the focus on the Ottomans would not reemerge in Denmark with as much potency as under the eye of Lorck until the Romantic era of the nineteenth century.

It was then when artists decided to liberate themselves together with society. They did so by re-entering the Orient, often after a bout of outlandish freedom in Rome, where many Danish and other international artists converged before setting out to rough it in the territories of Greece, which crawled with armed rebels from across the Balkans.

In one example, Constantin Hansen painted *A Group of Danish Artists in Rome* in 1837 to assert the serious intellectual work of art against the tourist frivolity that may have prompted earlier travelers to delight in the curiosities of exotic lands. The piece shows architect Gottlieb Bindsboll stretched out on the floor, adorned in a fez as he airs out stories from his travels in Greece while his proteges smoke chibouks and gaze in wonder.

At the National Gallery of Denmark, the country's leading arts institution, Lorck is largely out of sight, archived in the depths of its print rooms where hundreds of digitized works maintain one of Europe's most important cultural inheritances. As the foremost Lorck scholar, Erik Fischer prefaced to The Royal Library's four-volume, 2009 publication on the artist: "The prints came to acquire the status of being one of the Europeans' most important sources of knowledge about the 'exotic' Ottoman Empire."

They were in the possession of Rembrandt, among other notables. Yet, it is in the realist oils of Elisabeth Jerichau Baumann where most see the Danish-Ottoman connection through the arts, particularly her piece, *The Princess Nazili Hanum* (1878), based on her experiences in the highest circles of Constantinople under the auspices of the most influential European courts.

The canvas that she painted after the daughter of the Egyptian vice-regent, the harem beauty who stole her heart was last seen at an auction in Paris, sold by the sultan of Brunei two years ago. When the National Gallery of Denmark met with Pera Museum to collaborate on an exhibition of Danish artists in Turkey from the sixteenth century to nineteenth century, they were faced with many such questions.

"The general idea was to bring the images by Danish artists back to the place of their origin and to confront the historical reality of Istanbul - as known from other sources and as seen in situ today - with the imagery it sparked in visitors from a substantially different culture. The main focus would have been on the 19th century for which both the material and the sources are most abundant," wrote Mikael Bogh Rasmussen, the Queen's Reference Librarian, about his attempts to organize an exhibition at Pera featuring Danish painters Martinus Rorbye, Anton Melbye and Baumann's son, Harald Jerichau, among others, with theater historian Dr. Bent Holm, only to watch it stall over lack of knowledge and access to private collections.

These painters from successive and quite different periods in the 19th century and their different handling of Istanbul subjects would have nuanced the typical orientalist stereotype that one reads about in art literature and allowed for a new and more interesting approach to the reciprocal influence between the two cultures and their look at each other.

March 21, 2:56 PM  
Copenhagen, Denmark

## Mystique

The contemporary, living Danish painter Per Kirkeby is a household name in his country of origin and increasingly around the world, certainly throughout Europe. In the midst of the cultural paradigm shifts of the 1960s to '70s, immersed in pop art and avant-garde music of the American new wave, he evolved from his training in scientific naturalism to a more abstract take on the surroundings that held his most enduring interests, both personally and in concert with his national heritage. Kirkeby first took part in a disciplinary break from the norm entering the Experimental Art School in Copenhagen in 1962 the year after it opened as the only real alternative to the Royal Academy for serious, life-practicing artists.

After returning from his second expedition to Greenland, his head was filled with the poems of Michaux, the compositions of Cage, the events of Fluxus and so he began to simply improvise his way through the new creative liberation. His contemporaries advanced the fronts of independence from the old lines of patronage that had defined and objectified art into another commodity chain enforced by the royalist, orientalist, naturalist, realist, materialist.

Somewhere along the way, arguably while attempting to clear a path through the mystic haze of the Orient (thickening it all the more), early modern artists began to catch on to the greater creative transformations that changed the identity of representation and its politics. Instead of realizing a viewpoint, a portrait, stilling life to a moment, they made works that expressed inner life, the emotional psyche. The poet William Blake illuminated the essence of the idea, and the novelist Aldous Huxley echoed him to cleanse the doors of perception, to see all as it is: infinite.

As the saga of history culminated with the collective fiction of modernity, artists finally led the way to brave the interior worlds of the soul and intellect within and despite outward appearances to endure the metaphysical tension where unshackled individualism meets the demands of the world. In the light of such historical philosophy, the painting by Per Kirkeby that Tate Modern, purchased in 1998, *The Siege of Constantinople* (1995), is especially striking.

It is a gargantuan oil on canvas at four plus meters tall, overlapped with cartographic translucence, textured with rough intersections of crimson hues that evoke the flame and blood that doused New Rome on May 29, 1453, into the flood that became Istanbul.

Understandably, with respect to its size, the painting is not always on display at Tate Modern where space under its world-famous name is at a premium. That said, Kirkeby's artworks, *Stelae (Laeso IV & V, 1984)*, were exhibited in the curated series "Between Object and Architecture." Its dialogue with the geometry of the everyday invites subtle, experiential encounters with sculpture on the second level of the Blavatnik Building as steeped in the museum architecture that seamlessly integrates the brittle aesthetics of industrial extinction with the sophistications of its minimalist simplicity.

Kirkeby saw the proportions of the human hand in brick and was then visited by the muse while gardening on the Danish isle of Laeso. Its layered mortar is comparable to his abstract painting techniques and further draws from his geological education and builds on the weight of cultural history and its archetypes.

To casual eyes roving in the midst "Between Object and Architecture," the art of Kirkeby has the characteristic, intellectual difficulty that is both the cross and signature of what has entered the popular lexicon as "modern art." It is a term generally synonymous with the incomprehensible or absurd to express freedom from social habit and norm.

Works such as interactive, Moorish latticework panels and filigree screens by Cristina Iglesias, titled *Pavilion Suspended in a Room* (2005), for example, are more immediately approachable. And yet Kirkeby is not one to so easily brush off as one among the droves of postmodern contemporaries divorced from worldly concern.

In 2009, the critic Andrew Graham-Dixon renewed the conversation on his painting *The Siege of Constantinople* in the *Sunday Telegraph*, pointing to its resemblance to Eugene Delacroix's *Entry of the Crusaders in Constantinople* (1840), set in 1204 when Istanbul shed bloody tears in the face of pre-colonial Western expansionism.

The stratified Byzantine shadows of Istanbul would captivate the imagination of Kirkeby throughout his artistic life, especially in his paintings since the 1980s. In that sense, he has planted his feet squarely among the very core of his chief predecessors in Danish art history.

The National Gallery of Denmark exhibited *A Party of Chess Players outside a Turkish Coffeehouse and Barbershop* (1845), the most conspicuous artwork on display of its kind that is based on Turkish history, conceived by the painter Martinus Rorbye who was evidently more aloof from Ottoman territory compared to his utterly impressive, adventuring contemporary Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann, who saw her orientalist subjects face to face. Rorbye painted from drawings in Turkey once back in Rome and Denmark.

In his defense, his field sketches in the Ottoman Empire of the 1830s, mainly in Istanbul and Greece, are considered remarkably early examples of such exacting detail. In truth, he followed in the footsteps of his renaissance compatriot Melchior Lorck whose oeuvre as the first significant individual Danish artist in history also created the greatest visual record of the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century.

Today the works of Rorbye are the toast of classical Danish painting as they now grace the most prestigious art galleries in Denmark, from the Aarhus Museum to the Queen's Library. In retrospect, it is clear that he made art for the sticky hands of buyers taken with the unabated commoditization that is the mystique of the East. And the legacy of irretrievable Danish orientalist painting in private collections attests to the fact.



With critical self-awareness, Tate Modern curates, for lack of better words, the art of art. According to its vision, artists from virtually everywhere are shown. Yet, on the day of March 18 in 2018, there were no Turkish names on the placards where artists enjoy global recognition, at least not overtly. Many works hailed from surrounding regions, though not modern Turkey. In other concurrent shows, Jumana Emil Abboud, the Palestinian installation artist, reimagined her folkloric traditions.

Nazgol Ansarinia, the Iranian video artist, explored Tehran. Marwan Rechmaoui, the Lebanese mixed-media sculptor, critiqued Beirut. And with a close read into the fine print, Turkey did make a couple of special cameo appearances. It is first plain as day in one work by the late Nam June Paik, *Untitled* (2003) of acrylic paint and pastel on a front-page edition of the *International Herald Tribune* when Colin Powell met with Yaşar Yakış who was then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs. Paik is praised as the founder of video art, an iconoclast who spoke through the warped and smashed monitors of his works to dismember the collective unconscious one channel at a time.

*Untitled* (2003) has the head-shaking attitude of a generation coming to after surviving a seemingly terminal passage through the trials of history, where art, while majestic in its unsurpassed genius, served elites and preached to the choir. *Untitled* is humorous, shot through with the television motifs that sent the artist skyrocketing to well-deserved popularity. To that effect and triumphantly, the Guerrilla Girls adapted the quintessential orientalist art fantasy *Odalisque with Slave* (1839) by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres into *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into The Met Museum?* (1989), dressing its denuded, neoclassical female figure in a symbol that came to signify the empowered defiance of radical feminism: a gorilla mask.

The series of thirteen screen prints on paper currently on view were made in the years 1985-1990 in the midst of the Warhol scene in New York's Soho district to tell the story of women in and out of art. And the irony is historic as its core image emerged from a Frenchman's dilated pupils gaping at the mere thought of a Turkish harem, while reading the writings of Mary Wortley Montagu, whose dispatches from Istanbul landed in his lap.

March 24, 1:28 AM  
London, UK

## Konstrukt

Treading light on the exhibition map with only a single show, held in Istanbul's uptown neighborhood of Teşvikiye in October 2016, the Istanbul-Copenhagen artist duo Konstrukt has since maintained its distinctively stylistic voice and intercultural signature in person by workshoping around the world and with a sleek online presence, virtually exhibiting new, hybrid series in experimental photography and mixed-media sculpture from Beşiktaş to Noerrebro out of homey studios.

Deniz Özlu emerged from her studies with a more plastic arts background in sculpture, prompting the "Deconstructed Book" series, which they have since refashioned into salable poster art, although initially invented as a variety of post-literate sculptures made from maps and guides of Copenhagen and London to the effect of scrambling the touristic sightseeing view of cities while redefining literary materialism. Lone Eriksen approached the collaboration with more photographic training to examine the subtleties of collective perception, refreshing the contexts in which urban space is appreciated from afar and close-up in an era of cheap flights and selfie destinations, as in the "Spectacle" series.

Together they mix and match techniques and disciplines to slow popular perception toward an appreciation for what is essentially the photograph of the photograph, the book of the book, to reframe the visual narratives of global consciousness. They have a sharp, definitive focus as a pair of minds forwarding a truly internationalist perspective beyond the bounds of media and travel, even of culture and history to a more all-encompassing vision of contemporary artistic work. Konstrukt inspires a powerful, pro-youth aesthetic and an ageless attitude that breathes with an authenticity born of the core personal relationship behind the collaborative duo.

Özlu and Eriksen have matured and grown as artists and as people through frequent correspondence and occasional visits between Turkey and Denmark over the years to adapt projects and schemes furthering the platform they continue to develop.

Named after the Danish word for art; *Kunst*, mixed with the English verb; Construct, they relay a playful neologism to stir up a more imaginative, democratic reevaluation of the role of art in the midst of a domineering worldview propped up by industrial nationalism. Through cross-cultural workshops to encourage new ways of seeing, interpreting and representing capital cities in the twenty-first century, Konstrukt traveled to Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, to work with a groundbreaking feminist NGO called Mawjoudin (We Exist) which supports diverse minority communities and individual self-expression across the Middle East and North Africa.

"When we were studying at Goldsmiths we became friends, but we also had this professional connection, being active creatively, going to see galleries. I always wanted Deniz's opinion and she wanted mine. After a couple years I went to visit her in Istanbul, and we were both still busy with separate ventures. We realized that we wanted to do something together. How do you do that when you live in different places?" says Eriksen, reminiscing on her early days as a

photography student in London around the time when she began her friendship with Özlu before founding Kunstrukt.

In the beginning it was about exchanging ideas. We wanted to do creative workshops. Then we realized we also wanted to collaborate as artists. We had these two different elements. In a way it's two sides of the process that you go through as an artist, how you work with creativity, and how you develop a project. We come from different worlds. I was more into straight photography. She was more in the design world, working with objects. We try to fuse both.

Since the duo met, Eriksen has traveled to Turkey on many occasions, and Özlu has visited her in Denmark often as well. Looking out over the two very different cityscapes of Istanbul and Copenhagen, from artistic spaces where Eriksen and Özlu create, organize and discuss offer unique windows into the meaning of cultural extremes, which Kunstrukt considers with their dynamic originality.

The industrial horizon of Noerrebro where Eriksen keeps her art and entertains guests is on the outskirts of the Danish capital's historic downtown, inhabited by an ethnic mix of migrants, where Arabic businesses are advertised over African communities who walk through dense cold fronts lowering from the humid gray skies of the North Sea.

And in the environs surrounding Dolmabahçe Palace, on the other side of the spectrum, traditionally and modernly in Istanbul's trendiest quarters where affluent Turkish families identify as multigenerational Europeans, the gilded lettering of an Ottoman fountain shines through Özlu's apartment, equally scattered with Kunstrukt series posters and artistic experiments, a world full of question marks to the creator submerged in a wishing well of unfinished pieces amid the raw visualization of new ideas, also mirrored across the floor and walls inside Eriksen's place too.

To see where Kunstrukt lives in the Istanbul of Özlu, and the Copenhagen of Eriksen is like walking into the same room. They are kindred spirits, former university pals and old souls on a shared path through the nonlinear world of hard-earned eureka's and methods of madness.

"Our friendship started by sharing critiques which is a big part of the process. It's hard to find people, even in that aspect of art and design in general, to give feedback, who understand and give opinions about how to develop new works. When we were studying that happened very casually and we kept up the dialogue, the conversation. She was first in Istanbul for a couple of days to talk and meet. We were both interested in the same themes. We are different people but we have a similar perspective. It's still developing," said Özlu, then a teacher of concept development at Bilgi University, after beginning her academic career at Parsons University in New York as a design student.

We always need to find a way to be out there. Both the 'Deconstructed Book' and 'Spectacle' series flourished together. They each have our layers. It's our process. We experiment and share it

in stages even if we aren't in the same place. She was working with the books and photographs, and me too. We finished them together.

Özlu and Eriksen are not necessarily aiming to commercialize Kunstrukt. They echo each other when expressing that they wish to stay small, as a collaborative project exclusively between them to explore the cities, techniques and the works they are producing. Ultimately, it is about remaining authentic to the original visions, and to the personal relationship.

In their "Untitled Diptychs" and "Interior" photography series, for example, sharp motifs are conveyed to realize a sense of being human in creative symbiosis, as its portraits reflect the beauty and complexity of doubles like the leaves of an open book. And more, especially in the *Book Portrait* work the two-sided photographic art and literary sculpture elements are joined. The piece affirms the harmonization of artistic discipline and of collaborative idea generation when formed over the course of a timeless friendship made during formative years.

"Istanbul has a grotesqueness. Copenhagen is almost perfect," says Özlu with a laugh, emphasizing how Kunstrukt underlines the personal relationships that people have with cities, despite the mass mob tendencies that would pigeonhole individual experience into the cliches of capitalist advertising. "With the name Kunstrukt and in the works that you see it's our dialogue deconstructed with the fragments of what we took out, highlighted, and re-observed. We create them in layers, according to how they appear to us. It comes from a dialogue between Lone and I. It happens through a time period over meetings, through images, objects. Both of us will not force an opinion. We allow viewers to see what they want to see. The core of the subjects are the cities, but it's a collage about what we want to highlight."

"We did a series of posters after book sculptures, one based on an old book about Copenhagen and we found these guidebooks in charity shops. They didn't have much relevance anymore, you know, a guidebook from far back. It had totally lost its value. We wanted to make it into a book sculpture. We've been doing that with six different books," says Eriksen, who wonders with fascination as to the exact inspiration for much of the Kunstrukt artwork, considering its source in a collaborative brainstorm across Europe. "We're from different places so there's this idea of culture, and the contrast of being here and there. What is a symbol of a culture, or of a place?"

March 31, 11:41 AM  
Copenhagen, Denmark

## House

The curator Eda Berkmen is an eloquent thinker, rightfully delighted to work at Arter, one of Istanbul's leading arts institutions, currently housed in a vibrant, nineteenth century historical residence along İstiklal Avenue, where the extravagant Levantine and Greek tenements of old stand pockmarked by the trials of inner-city preservation and the commercial trends of the day.

For six months before the March opening of *Empty House*, she initiated the exhibition simply by suggesting Can Aytekin at a gallery meeting as staff prepared for the coming season, surrounded by the distinguished airs and unparalleled financial stability of enduring support from the Vehbi Koç Foundation. Its storefront window is polished to a sheen (despite the construction and litter of Istanbul's infamous pollution), lacquered with exhibition titles in fonts stylized to distinguish new shows. Inside, card-carrying assistants stand ready behind rotating security guards and a spiraling, marble staircase.

Berkmen has an unmistakable elan, clothed in a refined blend of formality and freedom. Her eye is steeped in the strength of originality that ages well. Lately, she is known for her work curating Nil Yalter, the Paris-based Turkish feminist born in Cairo, Egypt in 1938 to a life of contemporary art-making in critical videography, photographic installation, canvas painting and interactive media.

During the recent winter months, she visited Aytekin at his studio in Ortaköy, where he also worked as a student in its popular secondhand bookseller's row by the touristic shorefront mosque. It is the setting for his *Ortaköy Bookstore* (2011), a sculptural wall ornament on the steps between the ground floor's "Empty House" series (2011 to 2018), and the first floor displaying five series from his earlier works, beginning with the *Temple Paintings* (2003-2004) of his earliest venture as an exhibiting artist. *Ortaköy Bookstore* details the unique architectural feature of the literary shops that open and close with all of the fairytale fascination of a traveling circus as it packs up and unloads as in a dimension separate from the ordinary and its perception.

Aytekin captures the otherness of the seemingly plain. His architectural lines, gleaned from his days under the wing of eminent Turkish minimalist abstractionist Adnan Çoker at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, point to the emptiness of home.

In his conceptual rendering of domestic space, he paints and crafts his works with the raw emotion of a man bound to his private sphere, searching for a slit of daylight in the dusty curtain, a crack of creative logic in a stone, a foundation.

For one of his past works, from the "Rock Paintings" series (2005-2006), he sketched a rock for a-year-and-a-half straight, every day. He committed its every nuance to memory. He chose a boulder near a former quarry behind his grandfather's house in İstinye, a northern district of Istanbul toward the Black Sea. Its effect is that of a prehistoric cave drawing, excavated from his exacting diligence, his tireless discipline as an artist who has focused on his art foremost. For one

of his academic distinction, born in 1970 in Istanbul, his relatively few five previous solo exhibitions are a testament to the power and magnetism of his inner practice as a visionary who paints emptiness from interiors of the apparently mundane, from the core of the yawning cradle where at least a third of life (for those lucky enough to have a place) is dreamed. Tom Waits sang it best: "If there's love in a house it's a palace for sure. Without love, it ain't nothing but a house, a house where nobody lives."

"Home is, of course, a way to think about space, and how your imagination works, not in the sense of dreaming, but more so in terms of having to start visualizing, or formalizing ideas, because it always needs a space. The home is the first space. That is one of the reasons Aytekin went back home. For all of his projects, he works more like a researcher. First he starts finding clippings, paintings from art history. He looks at a list of poems, etymology of names, and he makes research folders that are very well organized, which is surprising for an artist," Berkmen said with a friendly chuckle in front of his wooden *Empty House* (2018) model also exhibited in an earlier form at MARSistanbul.

His research in three dimensions is first through sketchbooks like any painter, and then through models. Even for the older series on the first floor there are models that you will not see. I have a lot of documentation for them. If he's working on his *Temple Paintings*, he builds archetypal temples from found objects. Because that series was about the temple burning, he actually lit them on fire and observed them. Before he paints, part of his practice is to feel and see proportions. His whole practice is based on seeing. He is well aware that sight cannot be thought of as different from the body. The eyes are actually tactile. They evolved from organs of the skin.

Aytekin is a professor at Mimar Sinan's printmaking studio, which he runs. The aesthetics of his chosen pedagogy are especially clear in the "Inverse" series (2016), woodcuts on paper that deliver a central contrast through primary red with its additive for light, green.

They merge and mesh over Tetris-like, rectangular experiments, exploring the geometry of shade and shadow in the two dimensions that he untangles through the illusion of empty space with puzzling ingenuity. Interestingly, it is that quality of emptiness that he returns to as more literary minds would consider the idea of negative capability, to see artistic potential in opposites, uncertainties, mysteries.

Berkmen explained further by referring to the etymology of one of the Turkish words for home, *mesken*, which comes from the Arabic root *sukhut* also meaning silence, or refuge. And more, *mesken* is also translatable as "tabernacle" which leads into the conceptual development of Aytekin's earliest series, "Temple Paintings." In her charming intellectual savvy, Berkmen describes the relationship between both the "Temple Paintings" and the "Empty House" series, citing an impressive sweep of curatorial literature on the comparative architecture of museums and galleries as sacred space.

Aytekin is working on a new series drawing from the voluminous, historical d Group movement of modernist Turkish art. Its works did not make it into his current show, a veritable retrospective at Arter for *Empty House*. It was a decision executed by Berkmen, preserving his quiet prestige before a now gaining anticipation among audiences who are just getting to know Aytekin as a profoundly genuine, searching artist from Turkey whose attention is well-deserved.

Even for *Empty House*, the ground and first floor at Arter were not spacious enough to show some of his most important pieces going back to his mystical "Temple Series." In fact, certain of Aytekin's works, such as for his *Garden Paintings* (2008-2009) were tailored for the size of his studio doorway, made as large as they would fit to be carried out. It's a creative practice loosely reminiscent of the writerly passion of the American novelist Jack Kerouac, who was fed up with the size limits of type paper to the extent that he wrote on scrolls.

"We changed the space at Arter quite a lot. When Can came, he walked around and he was aware that the rooms were used more as a place to install objects. Because we rarely do painting shows at Arter, and there has never been a painting show on the ground floor, and only one upstairs, Can walked up to the balcony and he thought of it as a terrace for important speeches as it actually has a powerful presence. We extended the balcony, and opened a new window for passersby. Usually, painting shows align paintings to line of sight, according to standard body height, we instead played with the limits and structures of this space. All of the paintings emerged from the 'Empty Space' model, but the model, in terms of its proportions resembles this space, and this space resembles other spaces, and any other homes, as noted by the ideas of peripheral vision and the body-and-sight connection," Berkmen said, illuminating some of the most influential ideas of the architect and writer Juhani Pallasmaa while standing in the former residence that was then Arter, to muse on the metaphors of emptiness and domesticity.

The home of the 'Empty House' is based on Aytekin's childhood memories of his grandfather's house in İstinye on the Bosphorus. It is very typical Turkish, DIY [do it yourself] architecture. Dealing with the past comes through the artist's practice, but it's not in a nostalgic way. It's about taking it, accepting it and moving forward. All the forms that you see since childhood and that are present in your culture play in the formation of your thoughts.

April 4, 11:08 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Sculptress

In the first letter that Günnur Özsoy wrote to the art historian Marcus Graf in late February of 2017, beginning a yearlong epistolary venture culminating in her mixed-media sculpture exhibition *Memories and Letters*, she remembers the Ankara of her childhood around a park named for its swans, Kuğulu.

At the time of her nostalgic revisitation, she was then showing a piece from her Costa Mea series at Siyah Beyaz (Black White) Art Gallery and called her friend Sultan, who came with a surprise. She popped her trunk to show Özsoy a collection of letters between them, going back to 1985.

In her maiden letter to Graf, she described the heights of her ecstasy when she saw them. Handmade with her quirky brand of humor, intellectual warmth and unrestrained personal expression, her letters retain a distinctive charm through one of the last remaining mediums in which the inward, private life flourishes safe from the onslaughts of mass media and its technological gorgons.

Costa Mea, literally from the Latin for "My Rib," is an allusion to Eve of the Bible, who, as it reads, was created from the rib of the first man, Adam. Its series has feminist overtones intertwined within organic, polyester sculptures that embody the womanhood in Turkey contrasted with sparkling top-end auto body paint that she ordered from directly from European manufacturers. She then utilized a 3-D scanner to render the sculptures into images that she eventually designed into personalized stamps for her envelopes to Graf before broadening the experiment into many more slow dialogues over snail mail.

She felt compelled to find a core pen pal, and Graf kindly accepted her invitation. It brought up her past in a profound way, transfixed by a curious event five years prior when she found letters in the basement of an antique shop by the philosopher İlham Dilman that he sent from England to Turkey from the 1950s to the 1970s. In many ways her show, *Memories and Letters*, is a reflection of that discovery, reenacted through objects for viewers to literally step into the text of the letters at Pg Gallery, immersed in the storied mysteries of its neighboring antique shops.

The exterior storefront windows of Pg Art Gallery then faced the neighborhood of Çukurcuma, pasted with blown-up versions of letters between Graf and Özsoy, and inside an LCD screen flips through them for devoted readers to note the diverse range of Turkish terms of endearment.

Her correspondence spilled ink over into her many and diverse social circles, who responded with drawings and poems, and as for Graf, in his comfort zone of English. In the process of writing letters over the course of the year to prepare for her solo show, she also cut up paper and sketched it in shades bearing a resemblance to her Costa Mea works as a prelude to the over fifty pieces of fired, monochromatic sheet metal that she modeled after first sculpting paper.



A frayed wicker chair sat across from two typographic works ("a piece of art" on a simple canvas and *Buna Baktıkça Beni Hatırla*, meaning "Remember Me When You Look At This" - in mirror glass lettering). A transparent case of opened, sent envelopes was kept over the spare concrete gallery floor alongside the longest wall covered in the metal sculptures that convey a sense of the empty plane similar to a page but not crumpled to be thrown away like the Present Tense series of sculptures by Seyhun Topuz shown at Galeri Nev Istanbul, but as a more trans-disciplinary, time-bound exploration of the second dimension.

Her newfound sharp edges won over collectors and friends, as *Memories and Letters* is her bestselling exhibition yet since starting her solo career at Pg Art Gallery in the winter of 1997-98. In the opening hours of *Memories and Letters* some thirty pieces sold, many for up to 20,000 TL (then almost \$5,000 dollars).

Around the time when Pg Art Gallery began, its founder Pırıl Güleşçi Arıkonmaz walked into Ayşe Takı Galerisi (Jewelry Gallery) in Bebek, where she was formerly based, and bought a ring inspired by Don Quixote made by none other than Özsoy, who has since moved on from making jewelry, preferring other creative pursuits channeling everything from Turkic shamanistic divination techniques to wearable video art for trendsetting partygoers.

In twenty-five years, Özsoy has had seven solo shows at Pg, counting the current exhibition, charting her aesthetic progressions that Graf defined in her 2011 show, *Spiritual Experiences*, as "contemporary neo-minimalism." Among Istanbul's prominent international art critics is the Columbian writer Arie Amaya-Akkermans, who sees Özsoy as integral to the narrative of Turkish art history from modernism to the contemporary in relation to global trends.

"Özsoy belongs to a generation of artists who were widely exhibited and written about in the 1990s as the concept of Turkish art (as different from Western modern art) took shape. Artists experimented with materials from design and technical backgrounds rather than the traditional arts. When the curatorial framework of Turkish art emerged by the end of the 1990s, artists who weren't occupied with topics of identity didn't necessarily emerge internationally. They remain very relevant in the Turkish context, not only in exhibitions, but as educators, public commissions (of which Özsoy has had many), and in the art market," wrote Amaya-Akkermans by email the day after attending the *Memories and Letters* show.

Pırıl [of Pg Art Gallery] herself is a brand name that doesn't need an introduction. *Memories and Letters* is a turning point in Özsoy's oeuvre. She's always been attracted to these organic forms that for me are identical with the hyper-spaces of contemporary architecture and the aesthetics of contingency represented by architects like Reem Koolhaas and Zaha Hadid. Organic here comes to mean abstract but now it's possible to see that this organic understanding of both living time and the formal aspect of art can have a minimal expression, and that's what happens in this exhibition.

The exhibition (*Memories and Letters*) is both retrospective and introspective. While on the one hand it captures the essence of the entirety of her career, it also creates a more fragile, more personal space. If you look carefully at the works, there's this paper-like quality to them, it's like they could break any time, but yet it's strong steel, and in a way it reminds you of early Jeff Koons.

“And because of the way her work breathes in spaces, for me it's always associated with architecture. It can't exist without our preconception of space being empty, like the white cube, but real space is never empty, they live in a paradox, and that's the beautiful part,” Amaya-Akkermans wrote while planning an intervention with a young Italian curator for the upcoming Manifesta, a traveling European biennial held later this year in Palermo.

There's a shared history between the south of Europe and Istanbul in the legacy of the ancient Mediterranean region. Palermo reminds me a lot of Istanbul. We want to exhibit work in an ancient building where that paradox between the abstraction of organic forms and the maximality of architecture/sculpture are even more pronounced than in a gallery space. The concept is not final.

Street 6, at the Industrial Auto Park in Maslak, has for many years served as the studio space for Özsoy, as for many of her artist colleagues, also Pg, currently celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of her gallery in a "pop-up" studio only a few skips away showing its eclectic blends of past exhibition artwork together with new acquisitions and stunning gifts from the extended community. At one nondescript, barred and whitewashed facade, a sign reads, "Günnur Özsoy."

Illustrated white clouds on the windows filter the reality outside on the raised alley above mechanic shops where repetitious hammering and grinding gears adds to the buzz of material contrasts and resourceful meditations for the many artist in studios surrounding hers. The works of Özsoy are neatly displayed as she welcomes with a mischievous smile and a tap at her cigarette fitted into an elegant holder. She exudes a powerful wisdom to the effect of the Taoist maxim: "Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know."

“When I'm thinking or doing something, it's always flying away somewhere. When I start writing it is on paper. I have never done anything like this, because I don't like writing. I don't prefer to leave behind ideas about me. Now, I'm really open,” Özsoy said with a hearty laugh, candidly relaying her artistic metamorphosis as an inner, psychological change.

I find my innocence when I'm writing. It's similar when I work with metal, especially flatness, to find my own abstract, organic forms.

April 8, 11:41 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Island

The common saying, "no man is an island" was coined by the English metaphysical poet John Donne in 1624, who also wrote "for whom the bell tolls" in the same poem, a phrase that echoed across the literary pantheon to become what some regard as Hemingway's most ambitious novel.

In a similar light, the Izmir-based painter and sculptor Tufan Baltalar crossed the high seas of oil painting to cast his net over one of the most popular metaphors of the cultural imagination: islands. It begins with a triptych of self-portraits, his bust in three miniatures increasingly engulfed in a single wave, submerging into a single crest crashing down over his face to drown him in surreal obscurity. His sculptures evoke the archetypal human form embodied in the artifices of mankind, lost to the wild and unpredictable forces of nature.

Baltalar spends much of his time hiking alone, cycling while immersed in the Aegean seaside. He rarely stays in Istanbul, preferring the inspiration of his home steeped in the lush, bio-diverse environment. In a series of sculptures suspended above the gallery floor at the underground Co-Pilot exhibition space in Cihangir, he is the main protagonist of his work.

As a forest hermit nearing middle age, he sculpts his face as a backpacker covered in shadows of leaves from the imaginary canopy above with a keen eye for hyper-realism. Alongside his sculptural self-portraits are paintings on ceramic that convey the misty emergence of his central artistic focus: A tree on a solitary island, recurring like a dream before coming to full fruition in an array of styles and techniques on thirty canvases.

In his previous solo show, titled *Stand By* (his third at Pilot Gallery, where the artist had been represented for about a decade) he drew from the motif of clouds, mostly picturing a single white puff hanging in the iridescent blue. After seeing the work, his curators learned that clouds were all that he wanted to see for a time.

Baltalar has a curious talent for opening windows to the direct perception of unseen psychological meanings and emotional revelations. For example, to stop and look up as a conscious practice weaves a complex narrative in his subtle hands. In his palms are spiritual eyes that gaze straight through the veil of the senses into the inner world. The islands of *Surrounded By* transfer the experience of specific feelings from artist to viewer uninterrupted. In his hybrid fusions of aesthetic crossbreeding, Baltalar is a naturalist painter of emotional realism, appreciating a trans-formalist mentality that captures the fluid transience of being.

There is entrancing beauty in the plainly obvious. With right perception, the simplest illustration becomes utterly complex, the familiar strange. Visions of the natural world, devoid of human presence, are irresistibly exotic. When reimagined with creative skill, they point to the basic existential truth that the senses are like two-faced mirrors, simultaneously separating and uniting creatures and creation.

The heart of Baltalar's works emerges in curation. His relatively diminished scales make more complete sense when accumulated together against the flat space of a gallery wall. Collecting his paintings into a unified paneled grouping crystallizes his artistry, as for the clouds of his last show *Stand By* and the islands of *Surrounded By*. Comparably, his sculptural self-portraits are playfully severed with limbs disassociated above the elbow and knee, covered in shade, vegetation, water, fragments of the body stretching out for and beyond the elements.

"The landscapes mostly refer to a person's or a society's state of mind. They are feelings or moods in the guise of a landscape. He loves to accumulate small pieces together to make a bigger piece. His paintings form an archipelago of individual islands. In literature, in popular culture, in cinema, the image, or the perception of an island has always been used as a metaphor for self-portraiture or consciousness," said Amira Arzik, walking through the half-empty gallery space to exhibit Baltalar's unique dialogue between art and space, prompting curatorial eccentricities.

These paintings are actually his state of mind, his mood. You have darker days, scenes at sundown, clear skies. External situations shape us, like a tree in the wind forced to lean right because of the wind. It is hopeful landscape, altogether. You have all of the small, lonely islands that float by themselves, but still you have the surviving trees. He doesn't want you to focus on individual islands but to see the larger landscape.

The curation of the pieces resemble the subjects of the paintings themselves. The totality of his accumulated paintings are as an island of artwork in the main room of the exhibition space where nothing else other than his paintings are curated. Next, each canvas is like an island, floating between other island canvases, surrounded by a sea of wall space. Framed are the painted islands, visible to the eye, yet reflecting islands of bodily isolation.

Onward, the seer ventures into the white rabbit's hole to the wonderland of the private, emotional landscape that everyone experiences within, unescorted. While there are methods and means of solidarity, through love and community, *Surrounded By* takes a more introspective look, hinting at metaphysical places that are only experienced alone. It reconsiders the metaphor of islands as the ultimate fixation of collective consciousness to find an ideal ground for utopia and seclusion.

Pilot Gallery's exhibition notes to *Surrounded By* explore the island as a psychological metaphor by referring to examples in the history of literature from Homer's *The Odyssey* to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. It reads: "In [Carl] Jung's analysis, large bodies of water symbolize the unconscious and the islands represent the ego, in other words, the conscious mind. Sometimes psychoanalysts recommend drawing islands; as such they are self-portraits in the form of landscape."

The trend continued among iconic twentieth century writers, such as in *The Island* by Aldous Huxley and *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, and in more contemporary novels made into films, *The Beach* by Alex Garland and *Shutter Island* by Dennis Lehane.

For the last year, Baltalar has prepared for *Surrounded By* by first sketching and redrafting islands with a critical eye before painting for some seven months in his studio. In the hallway leading to the main floor at Pilot Gallery, there is a series of eight roughly painted, monochromatic islands on paper that preface his oils on canvas.

Blooming with radiant color, some with sharp detail, others in a more abstract haze, his aesthetic recalls the eerie ethereality of the German landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich, whose nineteenth-century Romanticism redesigned the nature of seeing as he shone a spotlight on the illusive fiction of objectivity, fantasizing the world at will as a folklorist spinning a tall tale that tells of truths more real than the pursuance of fact in the narration of settings.

Unlike the naturalist romantics of old, Baltalar is a more steadfast visionary of symbolist form. His distillation and deconstruction of a single image, one at a time, is what makes him stand out among his peers in Turkey and throughout the world, as well as in the global history of painting, and art-making.

"The idea is to give you a hopeful image, that you are not alone. Even if the islands look alone they are not. For some, he might be different from most artists exhibiting at Pilot Gallery. We usually do not work with painters at Pilot, but Baltalar is so delicately, kindly, and elegantly describing the mood of the collective consciousness in his painting and the gallery's program is very much related to collective consciousness," said Arzık, who works at Pilot as its associate director in charge of media relations, yet even during office hours when standing in front of the paintings of Baltalar she takes a long moment to absorb the emotional charge of his work.

He is not a landscape painter. He is much deeper than that. That's why he is in this program. These landscapes are not only decorative. They tell much more about the current days of the country, the current days of the people who live in the country, even the world.

April 12, 4:01 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Chute

The last complete work of fiction by Albert Camus is the philosophical novel *The Fall* (1957, in French, *La Chute*). It is an existentialist's road map of Catholic symbolism, narrated as a series of confessional monologues by Clamence, a French lawyer, who is named after the Latin word "clamans," meaning "he who shouts." He is a guilt-ridden man, and under the pen of Camus he endures a secularized, psychological retooling of Dante's Nine Circles of Hell in Amsterdam, the last of which takes place in the red-light district near the former Jewish Quarter.

In an essay titled, "Camus, The Fall and the Question of Faith," writer Jimmy Maher echoed the sentiments of the immortalized forty-three-year-old French-Algerian author in the last years of his short life: "Perhaps as he reached middle age Camus was questioning the relentlessly amoral, self-centered worldview of the existentialists, along with their notion of an essentially meaningless universe devoid of absolutes."

*The Fall* is a modernist chronicle of the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden immersed in the noir decadence of post-war Europe. Its pages are filled with fallen angels whose wings are clipped, long vestigial from neglect in the dark night of history bereft of myth. "If one would discredit religion, one should perhaps be required to offer something other than empty rationalizations to replace it. I do not know what that something might be, of course, and, for all of his intellectual brilliance, neither did Camus," Maher wrote.

In the simplest reading of *The Fall* and the life of its writer, it is clear that Camus was uncannily similar in age and characteristics to his protagonist. In his literature, Camus furthered one of the most important alternatives to religious and historical thinking, in pursuit of a more up-to-date synthesis of faith and reason in the popular affirmation of individual freedom, which is known as existentialism. While he did not live long enough to formulate a new fusion of theological rationalism, as in the Religion of Humanity created by nineteenth century philosopher Auguste Comte, his creative practice in the coincidence of psychological opposites led him to the all-too-human conclusion that some questions are more difficult to ask than to answer.

Firdevs Kayhan curated the seven artists exhibited for *La Chute* at REM with high school literature teacher M. Wenda Koyuncu, whose knowledge of classic Turkish authors like the islander Sait Faik Abasıyanık and exiled Nazım Hikmet informs his crossover aesthetic from the seed idea of an influential book to innovative conceptualizations in drawing, photography, sculpture and video art by living contemporaries.

Mehmet Kahraman, the director and founder of REM Art Space, likens Koyuncu's curation for *La Chute* as writing an abstract tome in a purely visual language. Against the blank page of REM's space as one of many galleries that opened in the neighborhood of Çukurcuma, *La Chute* is a storied hall of mirrors reflecting an infinite kaleidoscope of narrative interpretations, set in a place that breathes with such intellectual diversity.

There are many stories within the story of the *La Chute* show. Each series of selected art represents a different chapter, and within every piece there are plots, scenarios, profiles and testimonies. İlhan Sayın first leads eyes from the entrance to REM with the subtle grace of his pencil, outlining emptiness in scenes drawn with a naturalist minimalism and washed in the white of nothingness, the inescapable maw of the unknown, the unseen. Its bleak waterfront landscapes conjure an earlier book by Camus, his famous *The Stranger* (1942) in which an Arab man is murdered by a French colonial on the beach in the pivotal scene. The Turkish version was translated by Zeki Demirkubuz and titled *Yazgi*, meaning fate. The intertwining themes of physical attraction and racism equally fascinated French colonial intellectual Frantz Fanon who saw a connection to historic power in the drama of human relationships on an individual, physical level.

“Civilization deconstructs the land, but nature preserves itself and reappears. On the edge, you feel like falling. After so many civilizations, we still feel like we are about to fall. The works remind us that civilization always fails to meet the needs of human progress,” said Koyuncu about the work of Sayın, introducing the underlying motifs in *La Chute*.”

As a curator, I choose artworks as points for discussion. I have produced political exhibitions. *La Chute* is more conceptual. It's not about politics. It's clean.

On the wall opposite Sayın's drawings in the REM foyer, the *Koltuklar* (from the Turkish for *Couches*) photographs by Borga Kantürk leave behind traces of the past from the stark impressions of a couch cushion and the sharp angle of window light on an empty sofa. In color and black and white, he tells stories in silence without characters where all sense of setting is reduced to a flat, unembellished focus on the blindingly mundane.

Considering the effects of traditionalism within modern and contemporary art, *La Chute* is confrontational, breaking down the lines of reason that divide viewer and creator from pieces of novel human invention. At the core is the sculpture *Dip Zamanı* (Bottom Time, 2018) by İrem Tok, deepening the show's surrealism from Kantürk's couches to the piled lawn chairs of Zeren Göktaş's photograph, *Arkabahçe* (meaning, “backyard”).

At heart, *Bottom Time* is a comical piece, playing with the basic absence of utility that haunts the vast majority of artistic creation while creating something that would be useful, only its original form is rendered inept when made into art object. The curation at REM is in direct dialogue with *Yüzücü* (Swimmer, 2017), a video by Müge Yıldız shot during her residency in Ruse, Bulgaria, and made with a special thanks to another artist at *La Chute*, the Icelandic performance artist Magnús Logi Kristinsson. In the passenger seat, a fisheye lens captures Kristinsson's storytelling as he relays an experiment he conducted on himself in which he subjected his body to a surprise marathon without having trained at all.

*La Chute* exhibits Kristinsson's nine-minute video monologue, "I tried my best to see my name there," with a sense of humor as icily dry as the northern winds in Finland, where he lives. He

talks about the absurdity of his fall from the ideals of fame and recognition to the realities of time and forgetfulness. After running between an ambulance and the finish line, waiting to see his name there, and with his body in a state of emergency, he finally crosses the end only to realize that he entered the race under someone else's name. *I tried my best to see my name there* is similar to *Bottom Time* in that the art - in this case the artist's body - is made useless by the total exhaustion of his untrained physicality.

"As someone enters, the space feels bigger and bigger, into the emptiness. I first transformed the old frame shop into a popup exhibition called *The Dust of Time*, and the landlord liked the exhibition. It then became REM Art Space," said Kahraman, who formerly worked as a curator and program manager at Mixer gallery in Tophane until leaving to become a more independent curator, at which point he founded REM.

During R.E.M. [Rapid Eye Movement] sleep, if you have a dream, you can realize it. Artists always have dreams, but they don't always have the opportunity to realize them. We can cooperate with them to realize them.

April 15, 9:13 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Fade

*Fading Away* is an atmospheric introspection into the dark realms of early photography. Its impressions of rediscovered light chronicle over a century of remembrance, focused through one artist's original practice spotlighting, transforming and redesigning the appearances and textures of visualized nostalgia and lost time. In ways similar to the gradations of color from white to black in the palettes of classical painters, the photographer is an artist of light, a magician of the moment, exposing film to the sun and washing prints in the chemical alchemy of image technology born from the heyday of mechanical invention.

The maker is Yusuf Murat Şen, a soft-spoken, affable man born in the southeastern Anatolian city of Şirnak in 1968, and educated in Gaziantep before entering the realm of Istanbul to attend Marmara University. In the year following his inaugural 1991 appointment as a lecturer in the Photography Department at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, he held his first solo show, *Specific to the Place* at the Istanbul Sultanahmet Old Prison. Şen is a master of the antique aesthetic and its revitalization in the present. He approaches technological anachronisms by exploring obsolete methods of capture and development, also restoring old, collectible negatives with a fine skill and a weakness for chance, bridging intuition with intention.

"The solo exhibition of Yusuf Murat Şen, titled *Fading Away*, is a form of meditation around the photographic image [...] The photograph travels from a glamorous frame, to a moldy drawer, then to the attic, the storage, the bin, and if lucky, to the flea market, and its aura fades, leaving behind nothing but a cold stain," sociologist Ezgi Bakçay wrote for the *Fading Away* photo book.

Yusuf Murat Şen, by reprinting found negatives multiple times, presents the process of fading away. He transforms the process of the decay of an image, into a form of a mourning ritual [...] As the decayed photographs merge, they become one under the ghostly visage of the portraits they carry -- masks of the dead, one might say.

The initial four of his some fifty-five pieces displayed at Versus Art Project are inspired by a composite shot titled *Fading Away* by nineteenth century British photographer Henry Peach Robinson, who defined the antique look of the early modern imagination. Şen restores outdated effects with an artist's eye, employing special historic techniques. Wet-collodion is one of his principal materials, invented by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851, to make photographic plates.

Şen crafts the spill of collodion with artistic inspiration, gleaning the dangerous chemicals from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University facilities where he has worked for over two decades. *Fading Away* also brings to light his ongoing archival curation of 20,000 to 30,000 abandoned and damaged film negatives, antique pictures that he finds in Istanbul from the trash auctions to the used bookshops with Proustian persistence at the bottom of the heaps of miscellany that stock out-of-the-way bazaar markets and various sellers-of-old-things.

Outside of work in the classroom and darkroom, beyond his extensive home archives, Şen directs FUAM (Photography Research and Application Center) and has served in the same capacity for the past three years to organize the Istanbul Photo-book Festival at Mimar Sinan University's downtown campus in the Fındıklı quarter. Internationally exhibited from Sweden to Syria, and holding group and solo shows across Istanbul from trendy pro-youth galleries like Karga Art, to more formal historic institutions like the Tophane-i Amire Arts and Culture Center, he walked into the turn-of-the-century building of Versus Art Project, behind Atlas Cinema in Beyoğlu, where he recently participated in two group shows, *Locus* in 2016 and *Atapos Project* in 2018.

In the middle of the approximate month-long duration of the *Fading Away* exhibit, he spoke with curious students and workaday critics during an extended afternoon visit, as generous in the expression of his thoughts in person as he is with the creative enthusiasm that goes into each and every one of his retouched works.

Şen is a seasoned traveler in more ways than one, through time in his photographic art, and frequently in Europe, most recently for a FUAM exhibition at the University of Macerata. Distinct from his previous shows, *Fading Away* focuses more on figure portraiture and on what he calls "the gaze" of subjects who peer back from the abyss of untold histories. *Fading Away* departs from those stares that pierce through the veils of collective memory to form an immediate relationship between viewer and viewed. The old adage that the eyes are the windows to the soul are highlighted with entrancing vision in the hands of Şen, a seer into the shared lens where pupil meets glass, a seeker of ghosts behind the shadows of photorealism and into the vagaries of the unknowing wisdom that all is transient and will fade.

"I transform and mix techniques. No photographer uses silver pigments for gum bichromate. I print on black paper, and polyester used by ancient printers. More than the outcome, it's about experimentation, to experience the process of creation. All of these photographs have a past, a life," says Şen, an unbounded artist of the photograph; akin to the international slow movement, he patiently delves into historic practices with a calculated perfectionism.

Working in an academic environment is a constant exchange of ideas, with other creators and disciplines, whether it's a sculpture, sociological theories, or conversation with other professors. Having so many students gives me the opportunity to be a role model with my works and exhibitions, especially when they stand out in the art scene in Turkey, when I'm recognized, or receive invitations from abroad. The students trust me.

Unlike others previously exhibiting work at Versus Art Project, for example "The Third Nature" series by Gökhan Balkan, the art of Şen is not wrapped in abstract, intellectual theories. Şen does not necessarily begin with an idea, and then seek to mold his work accordingly. Instead, he pursues a more instinctual process, supported by his highly trained academic background and technical refinement with respect to the protocols and risks involved in handling deadly solutions and antique film on the edge of total disintegration. *Fading Away* explores certain motifs based on his archival and field research into abandoned film negatives.

One of the more striking is a series of historical photographs of children affected by leprosy in early twentieth century Urfa, combining elements of a bygone mortal disease traced with splashes of wet collodion developed on plexiglass. And his reflective ambrotype prints offer roaming eyes a mirror through which to see oneself merged within antique portraits fading away, scarred by the dry runnels of its creased and damaged negatives.

The effect is a manifestation of the Decadent Movement's poisonous book in *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890) by Oscar Wilde, only Şen concocts a purely visual experience like that of bitter medicine. He further emphasizes and elaborates on the truisms of the long lost past of times gone by with another series of group photos, stunningly altered to capture the faceless herd agglomeration of the human masses, as through a discomfiting metaphor that recurred at the peak of the industrial factory age in the 1930s when many of the negatives he redeveloped were first taken, materializing like something out of Charlie Chaplin's 1936 working class farce *Modern Times*.

"It's really important to separate what I do for art exhibitions with what I teach. I want to widen the horizons and teach as much as possible, but apart from my personality as a professor, this is my own take on photography. It makes me happy to see that the fact that I use many mediums and techniques becomes an inspiration for students. I show them that there are different approaches to print photography, antique and modern. They take these techniques and use it in a different way," said Şen, who enjoys impromptu conversations at Versus Art Project, laughing while explaining the sole archival installation of *Fading Away* because it lessened the clutter in his family home to the relief of his wife.

I have collected photographs for the past twenty years. The first encounter that I had with a found photograph was with one taken by an Ottoman photographer, a famous one at the time. It was cut, burned, worn, and had the photographer's stamp. I touched the photograph. It felt like a handshake with the photographer. It's not about old photographs that you can see online. It's about collecting them and really feeling them.

April 22, 2:04 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Glitch

Two years ago, concrete filled one of the keyholes through which the people of Istanbul accessed art and examined life. Paradigms have since shifted. The largest Turkish metropolis has transformed, inside and out. To many locals, it is not the same city. Millions of annual visitors merge into the uncountable masses and experience no greater depth in the ancient capital than mere window shopping on İstiklal Street, an open-air, commercial, pedestrian mall.

It is a capitalist paradise, a utopia of consumerism for the global middle class. Yet, the place and its metaphor are not without occasional clearings of neutral ground, especially for those led to intellectual, creative reflection.

One essential nexus that opens through to such introspective persuasions is Salt Beyoğlu, a pro-youth research complex furnished with a walk-in cinema, multilingual bookstore, world-class kitchen, winter garden and at least three floors of exhibition space to begin. As it reboots in the spirit of a nationwide, cultural resurgence in the old Europeanized core, there are flickers between the ones and zeroes, ghosts of misdirection that waver beyond the Hydra-like grasping of the mechanical industry and its illegitimate heir, digital technology.

In that serial dysfunction, artists live, breathe, and return. They are two in the case of the Salt Beyoğlu homecoming on İstiklal, a cerebral pair named Aydan Murtezaoğlu and Bülent Şangar who double-handedly crafted the course of contemporary art in Turkey in the 1990s with unrivaled foresight, enough to garner sustained appreciation today to hold the center of the all-important, historic curation, titled *Continuity Error*.

It happened on the way to the Forum, as the saying goes, lightly sourced in the farcical ancient Roman plays of Plautus. Interwoven around two rows of polished, maroon marble columns, performance artists enact the assembly line of a boutique clothing manufacturer. As one of five young role players explained, they will fold and present fashionable sweaters and shirts until someone approaches for a conversation. At that point, they become the performance art themselves, and in that way speak to the silence endured by factory workers, and manual laborers across the planet.

The piece is a collaborative work by Murtezaoğlu and Şangar called *Unemployed Employees - I found you a new job!* (2006-2018). As the performers maintain impromptu conversations they emphasize a worldwide discussion prompted by a generation of workers who stand between the lines of invisible picketers who would work if there was work, or who are not fairly employed.

*Unemployed Employees - I found you a new job!* is especially pertinent in the clothing sector, which has ever been at the forefront of globalization since trade expanded outward with unprecedented speed after the first wave of semi-automatic spinners replaced wheels with jennies and frames in late eighteenth century England to birth the Industrial Revolution.

Inside the hours of 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. (except Mondays), performing artists occupied the Forum at Salt Beyoğlu to review the contemporary contexts of work in a world where global youth movements addressed underemployment through art. On the southern wall complementing the performance piece is an installation of perfumes, and abysmally cheap swag like that seen among everyday street hawkers. Behind it are finely detailed sketches of hundreds of working class people representing every imaginable walk of life waiting in line.

The paper medium is divided in parts, as it is impressive in scope, lining nearly the entire length of the wall in the Forum. Finally, at the end of the line, a man does push-ups. Individualized sketches show men of the kind weighed and measured, faceless and burdened, balancing insecurely on ladders and beams. In another sketch, the monotony of the classroom is mirrored in the subordinate workplace.

Before the exhibition ascended to the second floor above the Forum, a thin booklet was available to curious readers by the gleaming marble stairway. Its title is *Errata: Necessary Corrections for Continuity Error as a Matter of Coexistence*. On page one, it read, uncapitalized: "one should not believe those who say 'there are no hierarchies in art' before questioning their positions [...] one should not forget about the power of those who possess the right to make choices in art; and act accordingly."

With that, the Forum segment of the exhibition concluded by the Walk-in Cinema (which then played the 1926 silent Japanese film, *A Page of Madness* with live electronic music by Sumatran Black). In the spiral of the stairwell on the floor shared with Robinson Crusoe 389 bookstore, the works of Bülent Şangar continued with a series from 1997-1999 shown in the Forum, first below with the piece *Cloakroom* and then an untitled work in a similar aesthetic style. From the start of the exhibition, the sense of continuity blocked, in error, becomes clear, particularly in the works of Şangar, whose *Cloakroom* shows a man overdressed while *Untitled* (1997-1999) sets the tone of repetition and its discontents.

The initial early work by Murtezaoğlu is *English Course* (1995), indicative of a more pedantic, direct style through which to relay the conceptual value of objects when redefined and given new names and meanings. It is an antique furniture radio spouting vague audio with a stone tablet on top, engraved in black letters delineating a language lesson. The effect is surreal, out of place, a critique on the anachronisms of postcolonial education and the slow outdatedness of its transmission across borders.

A short, quiet walk to the second floor of Salt Beyoğlu leads to a heartwarming portrait of a well-dressed girl standing on a bench in the Istanbul of 1969, as she smiles softly while a tanker rolls through the waves of the Bosphorus behind her. The work, *6th Fleet Istanbul* (20016/1969) by Murtezaoğlu has the feel of a winter scene, as the composition draws from the iconic framing of Ara Güler, who has captured the soul of Istanbul and its people since he took his first job as a photojournalist in 1950.

Murtezaoğlu shows her special knack for manipulated film with a couple of untitled works from 1999 and 2000, in which the cityscape bends according to the perspective of its human subject in focus. In the 1999 piece, a woman sits at a bench, and tilts her head while looking at Galata Tower and its environs, and while everything from the concrete boardwalk to the water remains flat, the Golden Horn and its shorefront neighborhood also appears at an angle.

It has a particularly Turkish mood, something akin to "hüzün", a Turkish word with Arabic roots that signifies an undefinable sense of loss, like nostalgia only more optimistic, even if melancholic and desperate. The feel is comparable for viewers who enter a dimly lit cast of spotlights in the section displaying a series by Murtezaoğlu titled *Tour* (1993-1995).

Its mix-and-match agglomeration of municipal artifacts previously appeared at Taksim Art Gallery for an exhibition in March, 1995, outlining the random quality of the travel experience from the perspective of touristic outsiders who would gawk at words that mean nothing. And with sharp, hungry eyes they are drawn to such strange incidences as the flight of an *Angel-Picketer* soaring above the *Tower*.

Throughout the *Continuity Error* exhibition, the sense of abstract confusion and intellectual impasse is striking to new viewers, especially as an exploration of provocative photographic installation. The works cover a range of dimensions, from the slightest wording to laboratory installations, and images both moving and still that span the breadth of multiple walls inside the spacious passages and dens at Salt Beyoğlu.

In the hands of Murtezaoğlu, the unsettling and bizarre is irresistibly entrancing, also humorous with a light and edgy air. Her work, *Landscape* (1996) is complemented by a related video of white ducks swimming in a pool frustrated by a remote control boat. And comparable is *Feast of Sacrifice* (1997-1999) by Şangar, whose touches of shock-art through photographic realism pierce through to powerful observations about the Turkish urbanization and the reconstruction not only of its infrastructure, but of its people.

Through his use of repetition, as in *Untitled* (Windows, 1997-2007) and *He who lives with his likeness dies from it* (1996), Şangar discovers and accents the overlaps where the uniqueness of life trends into social reality, only to dissolve into lived irregularities that are basic to worldly impermanence, though barely noticed, like a glitch, unfelt on İstiklal Street.

April 29, 11:02 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Absence

Labyrinthine walls on the third floor at Arter rise and fall like waves from the invisible depths of an ocean, where sightless creatures disappear in the mists of an underworld abyss. They are the works of Ali Mahmut Demirel, emerging through the darkness as newly discovered beings slowly moving against the ground into his field of vision with a timeless presence.

Instinct-driven, half-blind seers wind through bulbous, contoured dividers specially constructed for the exhibition space housed within a historic residence on İstiklal Avenue since transformed into a space out of time, now wholly divorced from the storied precedence of its surroundings. Demirel has such an effect as a man educated in nuclear engineering and architecture in Berlin with a mind for "Post-Apocalyptic Utopias." It's the name of his series that culminated in a video, *The Pier* (2015), one of the most praised and accomplished of his four works at the *Isle* exhibition showing under the roof of one of Istanbul's most prestigious and well-funded private galleries supported by the philanthropic Vehbi Koç Foundation.

*The Pier* is a uniquely inspired cinematographic adaptation of an enigmatic Dutch waterscape known as Scheveningen Pier, a national relic of runaway dereliction and hopeless perpetuation, akin to an overly cured and dried, frozen and bottled substance, though long beloved by the people of the Netherlands, recurring in cult films and books. Down a narrowing hall lit with a single, dim grey light, *The Pier* is projected behind a black curtain in a dedicated room where people first lose everyday reason and then themselves to the wonder-struck gaze.

In perpetual though tasteful slow motion, a lone wave crashes over a fog-cast sea. In the eye of Demirel, the crest of ocean water gains character, as the protagonist-hero of a nonlinear narrative that speaks from a man-made "Isle." Demirel has a filmmaker's steady hand, as his videos are rhythmically edited and timed to the rush of a symphonic, noise soundtrack by Biosphere, drenching the ears of his followers over an entrancing array of stylized multimedia designs austere woven into shifting, unpeopled scenes. *The Pier* gives the sea personality, as a force that would drown all in its wake without a thought and with a touch of acquired beauty, after a ripple smeared in foam.

The waters around *The Pier* approach like an inhuman march, a neutral party with a force greater than any enemy, and totally unallied. Then, as out of a Kubrick film, *The Pier* itself appears as a bastion of human power and also as a metaphor of human isolation from nature.

Humanity and nature represent two parallel, independent paths through the world. Often, and especially nowadays, they collide. Mostly, as in the preindustrial past, they coexist, as does land and water. An island is the perfect image of that imperfect dualism where one sides needs the other, while its opposite does not, being entirely self-sufficient. And as the sea rusts the columned foundation of the Scheveningen Pier, it is increasingly obvious that however high and mighty the inventions and constructions of humanity may feel to those on land, they are, in fact, fully encompassed and defined by a lower, earlier form of worldly existence.

In the process, nature destroys itself to create anew, with a magician's skill enough to expose the thought of physical death as mere illusion, because everything passes, and nothing truly exists in the purest mode of objective thinking.

The video art of Demirel is a bold reminder, particularly for thoughtful residents of Istanbul, that one of the reasons why city-dwellers are inundated with construction is fundamentally due to the basic transience of the world, that anything that can be called a thing will eventually fall away, mold and turn to dust, trailing off as in a forgotten dream. Poised with a mind for renewability and longevity, the endless battering concrete and grinding glass of the city contrasts frustratingly with expectations of youth and eternity, paradise and utopia.

Yet, the artist thrives where disintegration prevails. As the original Gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson said: "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro." Originality is born in the creation of space, the dissolution of time, otherwise termed destruction and loss from other more inhibited perspectives. Diversity breathes where what is beautiful becomes ugly and vice versa.

*The Pier* has the mood of a mystery thriller, though abstracted and devoid of plot. A lone bird steps ashore. A fly dies in a mass grave of insects at a cobwebbed windowsill. The last whispers of life on the island are breathed by a mosquito, unaffected by the corpses of its kind against an unwashed window. In the eye of Demirel, the mosquito is a mystical being, as it climbs up the dirtied glass searchingly, and then fades out in a smooth transition back to the slow-motion whitecaps churning up foam from the discolored seawater rushing from the shallows only to be plowed over by oncoming waves.

Lastly, the setting sun peers through the overcast sky, and a cross of metal darkens against the "Isle" on the eve of night like the stare of a lonely cyclops looking back at its only and imaginary friend far away and up above in the untouchable firmament.

Entering the shadowy, ink-hued air of *Isle* is a three-channel 4K video, titled *The Pit* (2017). It is a triptych depicting the winter, spring and summer in the life of a stagnant pool of water, set to an electronic buzz of a landscaped soundtrack by Carlota Marques. Its double, contrasting effects overlap through a fusion of undercurrents, flitting with subtle technical alterations and hyper-real naturalism for a hypnotizing six minutes and forty-five seconds.

Beneath and along, over top and beside, the air is still, while the waters below flow with the unpredictable and erratic strength of life. It begins with a wide frame capturing the scope of *The Pit* and then infiltrates the slightest detail, from the grass and rushes rustling in the wind, to a motionless frog, slowed together with the stone enclosure beset by the raw decay of vegetation. The liquid earth amasses and coagulates in a soup of time as the ants carry the dead through the hot, dry season that changes back to winter like the shifting of ghosts in a half-dead environment.



Marques tugs at the ear with his ambient sounds, mixing in the muffled howl of a country road where exhaust engines are loosed amid cricket ticks and avian calls. A pair of spiders feed on a multicolored locust. Pods of moss float and collect on the tepid waters, grazed by an unsettling swarm of roaming flies, and workaday ants.

Patiently, the camera works its way in from the desolate steps into an abandoned pool, stale in winter, overgrown in spring, brittle in summer. Islands of stone, of growth, and of litter cover the natural cycles of creation with its inborn destruction. Nature is left to fend for itself, to survive astray and marooned. No rules apply except the hardest and most banal, that of evolution on a shoestring.

Ultimately, by the end of the video, summer fades, then winter, until spring remains to hear the last laugh of the universe, standing in the water of *The Pit* where a heart-shaped, vegetal organism remains, swamped in a bright emerald ecology. Demirel here points to the harshest truth of existence, though out of focus and with a sideways glance that invites unorthodox interpretations. He has a peerless, gifted eye, likened to a special breed of artists, thinkers and actors who know not to look straight at the shocking and beautiful reality and its union of opposites, the ugly beauty, so as not to overexpose its sheer presence, instead accepting that it is also a force of life and that it will come from within.

The most recent piece at *Isle* is a fifteen-minute, 4K video titled, *The Plant* (2018) with a powerful, minimalist soundtrack by TV Victor. Inside a small projection room down a corridor subdividing the four works of the exhibition so as not to intersect the light and music of its respective visions, insightfully curated by Başak Doğa Temür, *The Plant* spotlights the extreme neglect of a broken infrastructure, beyond all hope of restoration.

Unrecognizable and abstract from any trace of its original state as a functional space, randomized elements commingle. Bedding wire, construction rails, concrete columns, graphitized walls stand at the mercy of toxic puddles that flicker with raindrops covered in trash. Skeletal buildings shelter cracked brick and piled tires, yet through the lens of Demirel, they appear with a highly visceral elegance.

He has a cinematic sensibility, as a storyteller of the moving image with an eye for the dangling vertigo of life on the edge of existence. *Isle* is a pioneering archaeology of modernism at the crest of the latest wave of contemporary art in Turkey.

April 26, 8:59 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Capsule

Established in 1910 by Frere Possesseur Jean and Frere Paramont-Felix, naturalist missionaries from a Christian brotherhood in Reims, Istanbul's Natural Science Center welcomed the general public for the first time to coincide with the contemporary art exhibition *Capsule* at Saint Joseph High School.

Knowledge-seekers from across the city and country gaped in wonder at the tens of thousands of plant and animal species preserved for study through taxidermy, six of which are endangered. Its biotic bounty is a petrified paradise. It is a garden of earthly delights for Turkey's next generation of biologists. And now, it is open for city dwellers to glimpse the wild past of the local region as well as for passionate ecologists, hobbyist botanists, amateur zoologists, recreational ornithologists and backyard entomologists who want to seize the day and examine such curiosities in a profound, enduring light.

Ahmet Birsal is the center's coordinator. An upstanding gentleman and host, he offers an informed, professorial guide through the spectacular array of flora and fauna that stand still and purgatorial, on the edge of where nature meets history. The vast majority of the fossils on display near the center's entrance are reproductions acquired from across Europe; the value of originals are exorbitant and beyond the small institution's means.

Saint Joseph High School is distinct not because its natural history program is the strongest in the nation, but for maintaining the oldest and most comprehensive collection of taxidermic specimens in Turkey. That said, the center is not a professional research outfit. Its interpretive halls, while utterly impressive to the average eye, are only meant to educate students from preschool to university. Birsal is eager to share his breadth of knowledge, forwarding a special appreciation for Turkish natural scientists like Nüzhet Dalfes, who is as important to the scientific heritage of Turkey as Rachel Carson and Carl Sagan are for Americans and the world.

"The church brothers came to the Middle East to teach French and the sciences, such as chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics. Now, the Natural Science Center is open for young people to understand the biology of nature, interactions between animals, different ecosystems, global warming, renewable energy and pollution. Climate change is now part of the curriculum in a light way. We don't usually let anyone enter the Natural Science Center for security reasons," said Birsal, amid the wide range of scales, furs and feathers, highlighting endangered and extinct species like the Mediterranean monk seal and an Anatolian leopard salvaged from a carpet skin, as well as other unique preservations from Istanbul's wilder past, like an elk from Belgrade Forest and a Eurasian brown bear who once danced for coins.

These species are what we have more or less today. The exhibition, *Capsule*, is about when we won't have animals left. They will be preserved, as in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway. It takes an angle on the aftermath of world collapse.

Walking through *Capsule's* space reminds one of the final sequence set from the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* with its blinding whitewash scheme opening as a portal into other times and dimensions. Fuat Eşrefoğlu designed the wooden construct like a true eco-futurist with architect Aslin Ersan.

At its entrance, the art of the Turkish-American researcher Pınar Yoldaş lends the simultaneous, unsettling effect of enlightening and darkening the mood. Her piece, *Regnum Alba* (2015) is a light-box collage depicting albino animals named after its title meaning "White Kingdom." With her touch of investigative minimalism, she navigated references on the topic to emphasize how albinism, scientifically referred to as leucism, is caused by gene mutations linked to environmental pollution. As a professor at the University of California, San Diego, and especially after winning a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2015, Yoldaş has gained certain well-earned notoriety.

"Growing up in Turkey as a girl, you realize society perceives you differently than your family does. ... So I started to develop this awareness about my role in society as a girl, as a female, and reading [Ursula K.] LeGuin gave me perspective on how things could be different, both in the world of gender politics and more generally. ... She inspired me more than any visual artist," Yoldaş said in a 2015 interview with Ben Mauk for the magazine *Guernica* in which she discussed her intellectual upbringing in Denizli before becoming an artist and environmentalist.

I've met scientists so artistically gifted that it would make some artists look bad, and I've met artists so analytically gifted it would make some scientists look really dull. But I never received a decent art education, and I think that was a good thing in my case.

Across from her piece is *G.G. lemon* (2017) by Jeane Briand, a gamete of blown-glass run through with a sound cable. The metaphor of the gamete, a mature reproductive cell becoming fertile via an electric plug, inspires nonplussed reactions in its viewers whose brains are likely to scramble under the visual blend of unfamiliar futurism and mundane modernism.

Such was the look on the faces of a tuxedoed party of silver foxes and glitzy matriarchs who stepped into the *Capsule*, themselves appearing to have surfaced from the past. More clearly stated according to the central theme of the exhibition, they stared blankly at *Svalbard* (2016) by Jonathan Brechignac, whose installation of twenty-five works has a chillingly beautiful ring of aesthetic detail that transports the mind to Noah in the post-biblical era.

"Saint Joseph High School and the Natural Science Center are not accustomed to contemporary art shows, but they did it very professionally. *Capsule* was made by the school's in-house constructor and electrician. We started talking about the exhibition this winter and opened it during Francophone Week," said curator Amira Arzık, who has mixed feelings about returning to her old school, yet is proud of the realization of her designs with Gizem Karakaş.

I spent eight years of my life here. All of the emotions come back to you. It's nice closure to do a show here.

As one ventures deeper into the *Capsule*, the surreal feel of the naturalist artwork comes to life with surprising ingenuity. Brechignac reappears with his *Sailing Stone VI.0* (2017) to link robotic artificial intelligence with the more unbelievable of earthly phenomena. As the stones roll along the floor, seemingly self-propelled by an inner instinctual drive, the art brings into focus the indigenous folklore of the Americas, which defended stones as living beings, even as part of the genealogy of all life.

They are the elder grandmothers, slowly shifting over the surface at a pace so slow they move unseen. And it is a myth based in scientific fact supported by close observations in a valley in the southwestern region of the U.S. where magnetic fields push and pull rocks in the sand. It is the only place on earth where it occurs. That sense of total singularity is found in the poignancy of the video *Sadland* (2018) by Bahar Yürükoğlu, capturing the depths of solitude with original sound design over a visual narrative chronicling the lifespan of a piece of land as it drifts from shore and is submerged under heavy tropical waters.

May 6, 12:01 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Spontaneity

Abstractionist Cemal Gürsel Soyel prefers to be called a painter instead of an artist. He says that he does not have the courage to work with new materials. Acrylics, for example, are a reach for Soyel, whose exhibition *On the Run* was held at C.A.M. Gallery to spark that usual flurry of cynicism and awe among first-time viewers and returning followers alike; those drawn to the enigmatic worlds of abstract art in Turkey.

In a word, his action-doused gusts of brushstrokes are filled with drama, advancing nameless and original techniques enough to transcend critical attention about his medium. He is a simple oil-on-canvas man, yet his work dreams up figments of hyper-conscious impressionisms to realize some of the complexity of human emotion, and of worldly existence descending from the drips and lathers of colored paint onto a clean, open surface. To a rational thinker, it would appear that only the bravest of poets might have the vocabulary to stir up some verbal justice before his utterly breathtaking, ineffable work.

"My paintings are based entirely on spontaneity. Of course this does not mean that I am working unaware. My point is not to express something in my paintings. The important thing for me is that I struggle in front of the canvas and express how I feel in my studio. My feelings in that moment and the situation are first and foremost. The important thing is to express myself," Soyel wrote by email, recalling his roots as a Cypriot-born artist who has divided his education and career as a painter between Istanbul and Vienna beginning in 1984 with his first group show in Turkey and in 1989 with his first solo show in Austria.

Istanbul is a very important city for me. I was 17 years old when I came from Cyprus to Istanbul to study at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. I learned to think and discuss art in this city. Istanbul is an experience for me.

*On the Run* is Soyel's first solo show at C.A.M. Gallery in Çukurcuma, a neighborhood that has become downtown fashionable in recent years; where Istanbul's art lovers and curious wanderlusts go door to door in and out of overlapping exhibitions between antique shops and stylish cafes. Soyel participated in Contemporary Istanbul with C.A.M. Gallery in 2017 for one of the fair's group shows. The year prior, Soyel worked with Versus Art Project for an exhibition of over twenty of his oil paintings titled, *Get Lost*. He remembers it as the first time he had the opportunity to work with "very young people," in his words. He felt the positive energy, the fresh enthusiasm. Marcus Graf, the art historian and curator at the leading edge of the Istanbul scene with his *Sweet Little Lies* exhibition at Plato Sanat, wrote an enduring text about Soyel to coincide with a public discussion that he gave with the artist for the Versus Art Project show.

"According to formalists, art is not serving anything or anyone anyway as it contains no messages or stories. That is why they understand art as a self-referential system of codes that is bound to nothing else but art itself. Only then can art and artists be free from all social and contextual boundaries and work in autonomy," wrote Graf, skillfully distilling the aesthetic

philosophy at C.A.M. Gallery where the exhibited painter Mahmut Celayir also professed that his art is purely visual and does not tell stories; otherwise he would have become a writer.

It is no wonder that every now and then, people link Cemal Gürsel Soyel's work to the school of Tachism... Actually, it makes sense, as he has spent a great part of his life in Vienna, where after being a student of Neşet Günel and Neşe Erdok at the Mimar Sinan Fine Art Academy, he continued his studies at Vienna's Fine Art Academy. There he naturally came in contact with the European school of great abstract painters, so his oeuvre is influenced by a deep insight into the tradition of modern abstraction.

Soyel begins a work of art like that of an elder retelling the myth of creation. He first paints the canvas pitch black. In contrast, he frequently chooses a palette defined by white. In that fundamental drama of opposites, his pieces emerge as from the chaos of nothingness, mysteriously guided by reminiscences of his childhood in Cyprus, when he often lost his way while growing up on the island.

Inside his densely caked and smeared layers of paint are his earliest fears, long suppressed until they emerge under the light of his studio. He is unable to settle down, mentally, emotionally, creatively; it is clear in his non-representational artwork. He searches for a place where he belongs, and finds it in a lack of belonging; so he continues to pursue dedicated motifs through total spontaneous abstraction.

"It is difficult to exist in Austrian society as a Turkish artist. There are lots of reasons. It is not my business to talk about that, sociologists should. If I had been a German, Italian or English artist instead of a Turkish one, it would be much easier. The situation has changed. People in Austria who used to come to me with prejudices in the past may even propose to work together now," said Soyel, who speaks with an honesty as uninhibited as the splashes of color that stretch across his canvases like some sprawling, acrobatic posture of a master yogi.

I left Istanbul in 1986. Since 2011, I live both in Istanbul and Vienna. Istanbul is now so different; the art I mean. I like the current Istanbul more in terms of its art scene. There are more galleries, artists and collectors. I know this because I have lived both.

*On the Run* exhibited a number of large canvases on its storied walls, but also smaller pieces that appear almost like sculptural works made of thickening, cresting waves of oil paint, as a still life of the ocean in three dimensions. His use of color is striking in its tension of subtle and overt repetitive patterns. Beyond his principal use of black and white, his reds burst in flashes of metaphor, from opposite sides of the spectrum, clashing in a visual scream of human power coming to a head under greater universal forces, as creation and destruction are personified in a single thrust of direct action. Soyel is expressly influenced by the differences between Istanbul and Vienna, and in the process admires the German painters Georg Baselitz and Albert Oehlen as well as the school of American expressionism.

"This exhibition seems like a follow-up of my previous show but it is very different. First, the size and color of my new works are different. There are only oil on canvas paintings in dimensions variable not paper works. The only similar thing is my attitude as an artist. I work spontaneously," said Soyel, who is proud to show at C.A.M., a gallery with a rare, professional reputation as one among only a handful of contemporary art institutions in Istanbul continuously alive and running for over two decades.

There are no artists who inspire me, but there are lots of artists who make me feel excited and who help me to find the way to my studio. I like to paint a lot. That's why I like to call myself a painter instead of an artist. What's the role of the painter in society? It is a question that interests sociologists and philosophers. Maybe I also paint to find the answer to this question.

May 10, 10:53 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Decadence

Daron Mouradian does not paint history. His recurring symbols are not inspired by psychology. Fish float with mechanical fins, birds are witness to human madness, and beasts of burden are halved into prototype vehicles. It is art: the pure and unadulterated act of novel creation. It is the alchemical magic of making something from nothing. Mouradian holds the philosopher's stone, immortalizing his life's work through designs of color, through reformations of light.

Words, documents and artifacts are not welcome in the alternate worlds that Mouradian visualizes, albeit while surrounded by Armenia's rich cultural heritage, rooted in the aesthetics of Dark-Age mysticism, Byzantine icons and the Gothic affinity to refashion common ugliness into otherworldly beauty. His technical mastery with brush, paint and canvas penetrates to the source of perception with ingenious insight. Every piece that he has created throughout his brilliant career for the last three decades invites the viewer into a universe of nonverbal puns; of preindustrial exoticisms; of the fantasies of unbounded invention.

*Open Hidden Game* ran through the summer, exhibiting a panorama of twenty-four paintings made from 2002 to 2017. Inside a circular promenade, and under high ceilings within the lofty, intellectual airs of one of Istanbul's more distinctive private universities, the Daron Mouradian retrospective offered serious students, curious colleagues and all open-minded oglers a tantalizing variety of visual experiences. They picture action-packed scenes filled with uninhibited mirth and violent pride on the edge of anthropomorphic realism.

The artwork appears to be steeped in the color and life of the paradigm shifts and sociocultural transitions that have defined Western civilization since the dawn of the Medieval era. His meticulously trained eye seems to have distilled the earliest chapters of modern history into simmering, satirical illustrations born of an unfathomably voracious appetite for research in the fields of clothing, folklore, ethnology and manufacture. In reality, the artist defends his creative originality by asserting that he has simply made it all up off the top of his head.

"There are a couple of reasons why I wanted to show Mouradian's works in Gallery KHAS [at Kadir Has University]. Contemporary art is extremely important. It is political. It covers the whole world. It brings out new aesthetics. These are all valid points; however, the aesthetic is usually behind the message that it conveys. This brings out the constraint that the craft is not in the work anymore. This is the post-Duchamp case," said its curator, professor Hasan Bülent Kahraman, who first saw Mouradian's work at the Gallery 77 exhibition during Contemporary Istanbul art fair where his paintings were displayed in the years 2015 and 2016.

I'll spend my life thinking about difficult art, but this sort of craft and aesthetic [in Mouradian's painting] does not exist anymore. This is not classical painting. It uses the images and techniques of Renaissance painting even. This is very Armenian in that sense.



Kahraman wrote two essays to preface the *Open Hidden Game* exhibition, appearing in the catalogue book publications of Gallery KHAS and Gallery 77. His opening piece is titled, *Manifesto: Daron Mouradian*. It is a succinct, piercing call to look through the artwork, and by doing so, to see the world differently. It is a cautionary tale, reminding all with vision that there are worlds beyond the appearance of things, and that these worlds are not only accessible through logical reasoning and its kindred sciences of material transformation, but through the transformative powers of metaphor, art, faith and ecstasy.

The characters in Mouradian paintings are jesters and entertainers, jack-in-the-box puppets and windup dolls. *Saint George* (2004) kills a dragon on a toy rocking horse. A pair of undersized men joust saddled on fighting roosters.

His portraits are utterly realist and swathed in lush folds of naturalism, studies in still life, emotive facial expressions in his animals; a frightened puppy; a mad lizard, an eavesdropping bird. His overdressed men and scantily clad women are deadpan with an eternal comic timing, such as *Hunter I* (2011). Its subject is a man with a cold, hard stare whose seriousness is contrasted by his ostentatious clothing. He dons a puffy bouffant and is outlandish from top to bottom, holding a long musket for a pose. His head is topped with a feathery fez cap. His ensemble is as bold as it is ridiculous, descending over layers after layers of fine, stripped and patterned vests, lined with loud ruffles from shoulder to wrist.

"I wanted to put these works before an audience who would like it very much. I returned their right to like something [in contemporary art] back to them. There are layers in these works. It is grotesque, ironic, satirical and critical. I was expecting some sort of acceptance, but I didn't expect this level of admiration and fascination. I am happy with that," said Kahraman, who often curates exhibitions that are more challenging to the eye, whereas he enjoys the opportunity to show Mouradian, one of the most prominent artists of Armenia.

There is also a kind of surrealism, going deep into the works. On the surface, you have a painting that is wonderful and entertaining, but when you think about it there is more. He is very successful in monochromatic paintings, as well as in the polychromatic ones. This is very rare. Most artists cannot do both.

Mouradian only paints about ten works a year due to the complexity and intricacy of his detail and the discipline required to execute his techniques. That said, although much of his painting looks entirely calculated, he in fact improvises to a great extent. His figurative proportions are reminiscent of the signature style of the Columbian classic modernist Fernando "Botero" Angulo.

In such dramatic caricatures as *Cocotte* (2015), *Trainer II* (2015) and also in *Heavy Artillery* (2003), he stylizes the plump curves of the female form with a stunning, cartoonish glory. He is a master of the photographic still in paint, focused on gargantuan, larger-than-life women and childish, belligerent men who uphold imposing and enigmatic airs, drawn as out of the stale breath of a forgotten past, and exhaled with all of the accent and authenticity of another age, one

hopelessly dated and stuck in the hoarding of its narrow window of time. Turkey has a kindred artist in the irreverent works of Mevlüt Akyıldız, who painted the rose-tinted early years of the Republic with a fiery wit.

"From which point does an artist move from a composed, complex background to an abstract background, or the other way around? This is a question which has been analyzed by different scholars. Mouradian never worked as an illustrator," said Kahraman, standing before the Mouradian retrospective, likely the first, which shows a marked progression from color abstraction to landscapes and interiors in his backgrounds since 2013.

This is traditional painting in Armenia. It comes from the icons of the Middle Ages. If you go around Anatolia you can see all of these churches full of icons, mosaics, paintings and that still continues in the transformation in the works of present-day Armenian artists.

Mouradian is also considered to be an important artist of the French scene, as he has held a number of his most important solo exhibitions at Gallery Mouvance in Paris from 1993 on after graduating from the Yerevan Academy of Fine Arts. In his professional photos, he is straight-faced in his studio behind a fan of brushes, with a cigar stub in his mouth, looking back with worn, sensitive eyes. He is not known to interview well, often responding with one-word answers and through interpreters, as he is said to be unilingual Armenian.

His works have all of the evidences of a true workaholic recluse; someone unfazed by the public spotlight. He draws his art from the wells of time's deepest mysteries and emerges with the dirtied hands of a worker out to remake creation, only faithful to the truths and lies of the *Open Hidden Game*.

May 13, 12:16 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Surreal

Julian Rosefeldt looked at a blank piece of paper. His mind may have been running with images, thoughts, projections, but he did not intend to record them, not exactly. He did not intend anything in fact, nothing in particular.

Instead, he wrote on the page to practice a technique known to have inspired the maiden ventures of his predecessors who rode the first wave of surrealist filmmaking. He followed the methodical madness of his intellectual forebears Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali by partaking in the technique of automatic writing.

It is a creative method that goes deeper than the stream-of-consciousness prose style that developed into a literary genre with Virginia Woolf's reclusive feminism, Jack Kerouac's speed-induced scrolls, and lately Mathias Enard's novel-length sentences. It confronts the unsettling and revealing powers of the subconscious, and opens to what the psychologist Carl Jung called the collective unconscious.

What came out under the eye of Rosefeldt was gold. And that is partly the title of his earliest film shown for his first solo exhibition in Istanbul, an eighteen-minute, black-and-white amoral romp of Rabelaisian, human satire called *Deep Gold* (2013-14).

The surrealist masterpiece, *L'Age D'Or* (1930) by Bunuel and Dali begins like a documentary about scorpions. Its dark, entomological focus is akin to the experimental video artist Ali Mahmut Demirel, who exhibited *Isle* at Arter's third-floor gallery on İstiklal Avenue in Istanbul's historic, commercial core.

In his unpeopled flash of cinematic genius, *The Pier* (2015), he zones in on a mosquito against dirty glass overlooking the foamy churn of the gray ocean below. His transcendental narrative sensibility is in some ways parallel to Rosefeldt, an artist of the moving image who has the eye of a feature filmmaker, although they diverge when it comes to exposition and influence.

No one with the faculty of sight and a sound mind should trust Rosefeldt. In one word, *Deep Gold* is counterintuitive. It is painful, wrenching, deceiving, captivating, enlightening. Finally, it is good, artistic fun. To say creative is an understatement. He is visionary, reviving a time when film was new media, as its chief seers and eager onlookers were mesmerized by it as a potential means to break the conventions of prevailing formalisms.

To its immediate initiates, the technical capabilities of film sprung a leak in the Kool-Aid punch bowl of so many art movements doomed to the dogmas of conceptualism and obscurity. It could both reach the masses and chart a way forward through the multifaceted aesthetics of modernity and futurism at a breakneck clip. It is clear that Rosefeldt aligned his work with that seed momentum that was soon coopted by the viral world order of capitalism, sold to the melodramas of domestic Hollywood dreams.

Dali makes a cameo appearance in *Deep Gold* as he reads from a rag named after Gala, his beloved, and stares back at the subject of the film with his iconic, beaming stare. Even the diviner is not immune to the shock that follows from truly seeing into the glass ball with unflinching eyes. It climaxes in a vaudevillian burlesque show as ribald as that filmed to reconstruct the theatrical protest of the seventeenth century poet John Wilmot, played by Johnny Depp in the 2004 movie, *Libertine*.

"I've been in Istanbul before, but this time I'm mainly working. I like Istanbul a lot. *In the Land of Drought* (2015-17) was shot in the Atlas Mountains where a lot of film sets are left. That makes them very beautiful. They are not actually ancient ruins," said Rosefeldt as he stood outside of Dirimart's space in Dolapdere minutes before his first opening in the city, eyeing the rush of traffic on his way to the Nişantaşı gallery where *Deep Gold* was screened.

I discovered the sets accidentally on an excursion with my students, and much later I wanted to do a piece on the anthropocene and thought that this could be an interesting way of telling my perspective.

The gleaming desert has an extraterrestrial quality in Rosefeldt's longest and most recent film for the Dirimart exhibition, *In the Land of Drought* curated by Heinz Peter Schwerfel into a vast projection. Its sheer, ecological scale is contrasted by crawling dots of white suits, humanoids after some unexplained fallout, as they file in and out of the frame like an investigative team descended from space.

The slow-moving, forty-three-minute film recalls Ron Fricke's *Baraka* (1993) and Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) as it muses on the nature of the world soul from a global perspective, conveying cataclysmic wonders of creation as a force with so much energy that it self-destructs while regenerating through unknowable paths of singularity. The artists of the world distill that essential quality from life and communicate its active principles.

"When you work on film there's always post-production, such as working a bit on the colors of the Moroccan and German landscapes [for *In the Land of Drought*]. There was no digital enhancement," Rosefeldt patiently explained with a philosophical mind as quick and sharp as a skilled fencer.

The audience completes the work. The movie context comes along with perception patterns. You approach the moving image differently than in the art context, where everything is possible and you never know what's waiting for you. In the movie context you're waiting for a story to be told. Most of my work is shown in museums, and not in cinemas. I like to explore the mechanics and alchemy of filmmaking and I have more freedom in the art world.

Reams have been written, and uncountable bytes of memory used to clarify and pontificate on the significance and meaning of Rosefeldt's career. His piece, *Asylum* (2001/2001) displays his

knack for cutting metaphors by an indirect critique on German immigration, in which Turkish men work in a newspaper delivery warehouse and are increasingly locked in a wind tunnel that blows every last page into total disarray.

In a similar light, *In the Land of Drought* shows the fragility and shallowness of human civilization against the transience of time, where seemingly impressive Egyptian temples and Greco-Roman colonnades are mere paper-thin scaffolds of half-constructed, make-believe figments of reality. The same device recurred in *Deep Gold* as a possible homage to the surrealist Mexican film, *The Holy Mountain* (1973), which also ends with nightmarish dystopia unveiled, as the camera lets its viewers take a concluding, awakening sigh of relief behind the scenes.

In the second half of *In the Land of Drought* the aerial lens spies the moonscapes of an industrial catastrophe, reminiscent of how photographer Louis Helbig saw the Canadian oil sands from a purely aesthetic perspective. The white suits weave through the remnants of life belittled to smeared concrete and a crisscross of tire tracks over the infertile sand of an open-pit mine. The colossal ingenuity of the ancients is concentrated into modes of environmental destruction, the war machine complex zigzagging into towering, outdoor stairwells wound through the rusted pipes of smoking factories.

Noise music rises like the grind of metal against glass, as a vocal synthesizer harmonizes to a droning machine before silencing to the flap of a bird's wing. The film ends with its post-apocalyptic walkers forming a circle before they bunch together into a dot around a structure that looks like an amphitheater, but is likely a sort of well for toxic runoff. The repetitive visualization of human bodies in and out of dissolution and unity relays the cosmic design of creation and destruction.

On a black couch in Dirimart's gallery in Dolapdere, there are three pairs of headphones in front of a flat monitor. Rosefeldt's film, *Manifesto* (2015) repeats. It is a piece that merges art and cinema with unprecedented direction, breaching their respective realms, while also catapulting them to new heights. *Manifesto* is a scintillating magnum opus starring the prolific talent Cate Blanchette in thirteen roles. Her comic timing is priceless and on point as she enunciates the absurd and insane verbosity of art's most vocal and outlandish of proposals. She recites manifestos by the Dadaists, Communists, Situationists, and ten others, through a delicious variety of characters, mediums, acts, interventions and displacements.

Rosefeldt's generous cinematography and tasteful screenplay airs the infamies of modern and contemporary art's enduring failure to connect with most people. He embraces that confusion and repositions it for popular appeal under a more democratic light. Art is not going anywhere. It was here when people lived in caves. It will conceivably be here after humanity has made its grand exit. Art reflects life, its enigma.

May 17, 11:27 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Poetics

Mona Hatoum stepped into the bunker. It was not the kind her compatriots know in Palestine, where her family originated and fled from Haifa to Beirut following the 1948 Nakbah. Instead, she went underground to the ambiance of classic jazz and good coffee, and with a big smile to greet her fellow artist, Ayşe Erkmen during her show last winter at Riverrun with Bernard Frize, named *Badminton on Meadow*. It was an event as curious as the venue itself for the art world of Istanbul, where the names Erkmen, Frize, and distinguished guests like Hatoum and the French documentary feminist Agnes Varda, have turned heads.

The freshly opened Riverrun had only held one exhibition prior, with the conceptual installation artist Sarkis, a legendary name in his resident Paris, eminent as Füreya Koral's last curator before her passing, and a global attractor from the U.S. to Japan and three dozen countries in between. Not every gallery in Istanbul has the confidence to fly into the stratosphere of cultural achievement as it overlaps from Turkey into the greater world. But as Riverrun's owner Alpagut Gültekin, also publisher of Norgunk books, says with a frank ease: "We sell coffee and make exhibitions."

Riverrun is not a true gallery in the traditional sense, and so they are free from the burdens that hold most like-minded institutions fast to the spring-loaded affairs of representation and prestige. In the Bosphorus chill, Mona Hatoum warmed to the good company of close colleagues and old friends. Her show *Displacements* with Erkmen occurred simultaneously at the Museum of Fine Arts Leipzig (MdbK).

"Both artists integrate historical contexts of place in their art, and each finds unique processes of reflection about personal as well as global issues," reads the MdbK notes on *Displacements*. In the out-of-the-way air of Riverrun's basement, beyond the spheres of spotlight and fashion, she found a place she liked; a home in the bunker, for her works, her life.

Bookish and keen, Gültekin and his partner Ayşe Orhun asked Hatoum if they might curate a selection of her art at Riverrun, and she gladly complied. An unfortunate incident involving overhead baggage led her to miss the preview. Riverrun took matters into its own hands, managing the curation themselves. When they sent back images, Hatoum approved. They had captured her essence for a mini/semi retrospective with pieces ranging from 1983 to 2017. While relatively unimportant in terms of her developing practice and its appearance under the radar of galleries, critics and markets, the exhibition *Every Wall a Door* is a welcome vitalization of her art for Istanbul's wanderers who are not lost.

Hatoum began her life path as an artist by another stroke of kismet. In her early twenties, she was a disgruntled office worker and aspiring artist with an imposing father in Beirut when she went to London for a visit in 1975. It was fate that civil war broke out in Lebanon while she was away, and tragically lingering to ravage her birthplace for the next fifteen years. In the first nine months of the war, when she was unable to fly back home, she did not waste time, enrolling immediately

at the Byam Shaw School of Art, and continuing without break at the Slade School. In 1981, as she finished her studies, she was already a working artist, performing with the London Filmmakers Co-op and the Institute of Contemporary Arts to name a few.

Traces of Mona Hatoum as a performance artist are present in the Riverrun exhibition, *Every Wall A Door*, named after the centerpiece work, *Every Door a Wall* (2003). It is a visual play on the lack of public transparency with regard to the imprisonment of migrants. An X-rayed group of detained border-crossing Mexicans sit handcuffed against unreadable text as in an impressionistic haze. She clipped the image from a newspaper and printed it on a voile curtain, which Gültekin sharply curated as an entry point to the bunker, backlit with the video work, *So much I want to say* (1983). The effect of soft, television lighting behind a veil is a Hatoum motif, characteristic to the style of her profile. The delicacy in her choice of materials contrasts with the strength of her subject matter, as reflected in the eyes of its unflagging witnesses.

Throughout her career, she has repeated that she dislikes talking about her work. In an early interview following one of her more controversial performative works that she offered to the public a week before the Israeli siege of Beirut, titled *Under Siege* (1983), her maturation as a radical artist shines through with a comic edge. To relatively normal questions, she replied with an irony that only someone with the courage to be on view for seven hours at a time covered in clay could muster. After a series of short answers, many incomprehensible to the questioner, such as when she refers to Western news reporting as entertaining fiction, he finally gets solid material after asking her if she visits her parents often. "It's a nightmare when I do," she said before digressing into an account where she finds toy soldiers in the wreckage of her parent's home in Beirut who tell her they were only obeying orders.

For the next few years, unaware bystanders and art enthusiasts would watch with equal parts horror and fascination as she pursued such means to her artistic ends as wearing a black stocking mask and cutting it open with a knife before lying bagged and naked surrounded by newspapers (*The Negotiating Table*, 1983), trapping herself naked in a see-through container with running voiceover news commentary (*Under Siege*, 1983) and crawling in public on all fours to serve kidneys to witnesses from her bloodied clothes (*Variations on Discord and Divisions*, 1984).

As a proud Palestinian woman living in the historic, imperial center of the West, she rode the waves of the shock art movement contemporary to her postgraduate years by reenacting the traumas of violence, torture, incarceration, migration and war.

Yet, at the time, she was still afraid to speak in public, despite voicing the Palestinian struggle through nonverbal acts of solidarity. After traveling to Vancouver for a show, she arrived all the way from London sorely unprepared and ridden with anxiety, throwing together her piece the day before. She was scraping by then and felt overwhelmed, personally, in her art and life. By the time she had the opportunity to work out of a studio at Cardiff Institute of Higher Education as a senior fellow in fine art in 1989, she dove headlong out of performance to use materials to craft her special brand of free expression.

The piece that could be seen as a direct leap from her performances to her medium-based works is *Over my Dead Body* (2005), which she cited as touching on themes from *Under Siege* as "a humorous reversal of power relationships" in one of the most comprehensive interviews that she has ever given, with art critic Michael Archer, published in the Mona Hatoum monograph with *Phaidon*. In the lower right hand corner of the work at Riverrun, it is cataloged as the third print of thirty-five, which is significantly close to the first artist print. The word about town in Istanbul is that *Every Wall a Door* means that for the first time in many years, affordable works by Mona Hatoum are on the market. Usually her pieces are much larger and costlier, furnishing museums under representation by her sole gallery, White Cube in London.

Most of the works at *Every Wall a Door* are not only small in size, they are also faint to the eye. Her defining variation on themes of painful fragility juxtaposed against the meaning and context in the brutalities of war-torn exile require a specific visual acuity, one open to the vulnerability of the artist as the humanist center of the dialogue on conflict and displacement. She employs human hair, threaded through toilet paper, for *Stream (Rough)* (2013) and welded meshed crosshairs into parchment paper for *Drawing Heat I-V [4]* (2017), the latest of her ongoing efforts to visualize the unceasing struggle for a place on the delicate body of history, of the land, of existence.

One of her more sensitive chroniclers was a true elder statesman, the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said, whose essay, "The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum's Logic of Irreconcilables" was first published by Tate Gallery in London for her 2000 exhibition, *The Entire World as a Foreign Land* and later appeared in the catalogue for her Arter exhibition in Istanbul, *You Are Still Here*, which was seen through the storefront gallery window on İstiklal Avenue in the spring of 2012. "Familiarity and strangeness are locked together in the oddest way, adjacent and irreconcilable at the same time," wrote Said, the author of *Orientalism* (1978). "The sorrow and loss are real, but the sanctity of home remains beneath the surface, a place to which one finally accedes through love and prayer."

May 20, 11:46 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Steel

A regular patron walks into a cafe. They order up, "I'll take the usual." It seems normal only because it has happened before.

Now, an art enthusiast, especially that special brand taken by contemporary sculpture, walks into a gallery. There are incomprehensible shapes on the walls, on the floors. There is a dense, philosophical text to read. To the regular, it is the usual.

To new patrons, it is a most eccentric and even pretentious display of a kind of baseless superiority complex founded on something like group hypnosis, the self-satisfied collective captivation with a totally irrational consensus, almost like a mask that disguises the true underbelly of unthinking, mass attraction. A moth is burned on the flickering light, and the next follows in a headlong rush.

And what is it? It could be a place to hide a treasury of wealth, of ideas, of sentiments, visible only to the initiates. Who is the person that walks offstage? They might be someone that no one would suffer, so they sculpt mainstream desire into a painted icon.

Art is not immune to ridicule. It arguably needs criticism. Though there is a hasty cynicism at work in those who would laugh at the challenge of independent and nonconformist creativity in a city polluted in more ways than one, craving free expression like clean air, tasted exclusively and in the most remote of corners, rarely, in the eye of its storm, downtown in the core.

Taking a step back. Those in search of art that trends to a different beat, that is difficult, unpopular and even questionable find themselves standing in islands of small crowds surrounded by the high seas of the greater society outside that amasses unfocused like the runaway trains of the pedestrian mobs and traffic-jammed bridges, locked behind doors sheltering domestic tradition, inside saving all of the little boxes from office to home.

Ömer Pekin went up against a number of walls, dissatisfied with the limitations of architecture as a visionary graduate from leading institutions, Kunste Wien in Austria and SCI-Arc in Southern California. Like many degree-holding individualists, he had more to say than could be contained by the halls of academia, oppressed by its echoing delays. It is, in fact, a well-worn path taken by many architects, to move into the art realm where more expansive thoughts are realizable. A notable example is the multimedia artist and writer Pınar Öğrenci who founded MARSistanbul after her architectural research studio as a socially provocative artist initiative in Istanbul's core district Çukurcuma.

Deeply informed by the rich literatures on the intersections of art and architecture from Europe and America, Pekin found his way to a book by the European Graduate School professor and philosopher Graham Harman, which sparked his fascination that led to the painterly, tactile

forms of his exhibition at Versus Art Project, *The Uncanny, The Real, The Epiphany*. Harman is a leading voice in a new movement of contemporary philosophy known as speculative realism.

Like most expert philosophical discourse, Harman is barely accessible to the layperson unschooled in the total genealogy of thinkers from Socrates to Judith Butler and everyone parallel and in between who has ever critiqued human thought with the systematic inquiry of the Western academic discipline that rivals Talmudists and Vedantists for the sheer mental exhaustion that it requires to build such knowledge from generation to generation of bookworms. Generally speaking, speculative realism resists human finitude, rejecting the essential principles of Kant and all forms of anthropocentrism.

"Since real objects exceed the grasp not only of human theory, perception, and practical action but of every sort of direct relation, then I wonder how it is possible for one entity to influence another in any way," wrote Harman in the fourth chapter of his book *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* published in 2018, read soon after by the architect-sculptor Ömer Pekin, who had a most brilliant idea light go on in his head after scanning the passage.

Given that real objects are, by definition, incapable of touching each other, we need to find a way in which they touch without touching, through some sort of indirect contact. This concept is known in OOO [object-oriented ontology] as 'vicarious causation'.

Harman's writing is enlarged and pasted on the wall as part of the Versus Art Project exhibition curation for *The Uncanny, The Real, The Epiphany*. Its effect on the mind of Pekin is distilled in the proposition that Harman puts forth, namely that mental experience is like a theatrical model of aesthetics, where, as cited, the reader of Homer's classic metaphor of the "wine-dark sea" takes on wine-dark qualities themselves when they read the epic, as a method actor assumes a role with hyperrealist tendencies. Pekin visualized "The Epiphany" from the text as the culmination of a series of intellectual encounters, first exploring what he and Versus Art Project have termed, "The Uncanny."

Whirring vibrations of untitled, colored steel are turned on and left to public discretion upstairs in a historic, Levantine apartment building typical to the back alleyways of old Beyoğlu district, a minute's walk from the back entrance through the vintage airs of Atlas Cinema. A pool of water ripples and quakes atop a black disc, a folded sheet is powder coated and glimmers with warbling circles of light projection, a lacquered oblong and curved rectangular monolith are grounded against the wooden floors.

The artist says, and gallerists confirm, that it is all one contiguous piece of work. Even when it seems that creatives have mapped the bounds of contemporary abstraction, with some cursing the day it was born, a young and inventive thinker like Ömer Pekin steps in to retrace the cartographies of open-form expression.

His work is truly uncanny. Inspired by the Statue of Liberty as a sculpture, as it is also fitted with electricity and plumbing. His pieces are literally pieces, fragments of the contemporary and its postmodern aesthetics, sketched against the blank canvas of the gallery walls at Versus Art Project to compel onlookers to reach out and feel the steel material that is synonymous with industrial strength, with military might, even mythological power.

Part of the curation included a semi-capsule-like wall structure. Entering it is like walking into a preliminary architectural sketch of an Orthodox church, with its anterior poked through with holes to ventilate the air for the preservation of holy books, or in this case, to allow people to observe the art from an altered perspective, revealing certain aesthetic similarities to the projections of circular light. In that way, as Harman's philosophy details, the art is personified. By looking into the holes, the person becomes what they perceive, or what they consume, sensually, mentally or otherwise.

"In the interplay of objects and senses, the possibility of a fixed truth is suspended. [...] Light and darkness bind all things in reality, and metaphor emulates the binding of reality-inspiring thoughts and feelings," wrote Pekin in an essay with the young philosopher Emir İnanç to accompany *The Uncanny, The Real, The Epiphany* in which the two intellects merge over a series of molasses-heavy, trench-deep statements of pure, abstract thought.

Through the power of imagination, a metaphor effortlessly gives birth to other metaphors as their qualities collide with each other, and bring into existence new compositions. [...] The metaphor will initiate and merge you with the real, bringing you a pulse closer to the heart of darkness.

May 24, 12:08 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Misdirection

The paintings of Ala Alhassoun are as fresh as his memories of Syria, as he delicately draws ink onto a clean, white sheet of paper in the warm, late spring air, one fine afternoon in Istanbul's classy, artistic Çukurcuma district. He was a painter in Aleppo, where he worked with Kelimat Gallery, which also moved to Istanbul under the direction of Adnan Alahmad, now in the Üsküdar neighborhood of Kuzguncuk, the Bosphorus shorefront village of gardens on the Anatolian side of the city.

Kelimat Gallery proudly represents Ala's uncle, also his first art teacher Ibrahim Alhassoun, whose unforgettable neoimpressionist aesthetic recalls the primordial, cavernous reaches of human expression, charged with subtly illustrative lines and dramatic shades of contrasting palettes. After his roundabout arrival to Istanbul in 2016, by way of Cairo, Gaziantep and Hatay, Ala has not exhibited with Kelimat, breaking entirely from his uncle's education to pursue distinct technical and conceptual approaches to painting. It shows in the six pieces at the show *Metaphorical Spaces*, titled *Silence* (Sukut, 2018), as his utterly unique style, choice of colors, and objective abstractions fascinate, especially when juxtaposed with his ideas.

"Ibrahim is more abstract than me, and more emotional. He always remembers his mother's dress, his village. For me, art happens in other ways. Most people like the colors of my works and find the simple concept interesting. It's not specifically Aleppo that I'm painting. Aleppo is a metaphorical concept. Aleppo is every city, all of the empty cities. Color for me is about offering the scene, and a new way to paint," said Ala Alhassoun at MARSistanbul as he minded the space while painting at its street entrance on Bostanbaşı Avenue before entering beneath a boutique coffee business, Arabica Trading House.

Watch color and power. In the empty city, we are not here. There is always change. My workshop changes all of the time too. I'm working all of the time everywhere. I like to paint outdoors in Istanbul. It's the city of light, not Paris [laughs].

Ala Alhassoun is a young artist. He exudes the immortal optimism of youth that no war has ever defeated. MARSistanbul has that welcome quality of earthy verve, of spiritual warmth and creative camaraderie. It is a thin yet vitalizing slice from the population, where, for example, the active interrogations of one's more rebellious student years resurface to make life out of art, to stand for all that is good and right. That outlook has inspired Ala, who breathes deep in the artist-led space cultivated by the architect-based artist and writer Pınar Öğrenci, one of Turkey's most influential voices in the sphere of Istanbul's non-commercial art scene. She is clear, though, that however directly she might throw her spotlight onto a politically-sensitive subject, her controversial sources and social processes are intended purely for artistic ends.

One of the more stunning pieces at *Metaphorical Space* is *Off-History*, a nearly twenty-minute video work by Selina Halvadaki. It exhumes black-and-white archival footage from the 1970s during one day in the life of far-right Greek nationalism in a show of pomp and ceremony as

extreme as it is unsettling. The thundering passage of tanks is followed by fustanella-wearing armed parades, as president and archbishop meet to kiss an upraised, gilded bible and bless the sea for an Eastern ritual under the all-seeing eyes of the military. A construction glut is erected and finally abandoned to shadow the people in the cold, dark tragedy that then rose to unprecedented heights of shame. The bright, rectangular spectrums of Ala Alhassoun are curated beside the grim Halvadaki video that includes narrations by eyewitnesses who still cringe at the traumas of Greece in relationship to its histories of Civil War, dictatorship, and all forms of state failure. Alhassoun is careful to remind those who might appreciate his *Silence* series that Aleppo, and Syria, could be anywhere, that the issues are human, and so, are shared universally.

"Our starting point was the video of Louis Henderson [titled *The Day Before the Fires* (2012)]. There were huge demonstrations in 1952 in Cairo. The video is about anti-colonialist demonstrations that became bigger and bigger. People burned the buildings that were symbols of Western imperialism, such as the opera, cinemas and malls. It was the time when colonialism finished and Nasser's regime began. And now, the Arab Spring was in Cairo again in the same streets and squares. Henderson depicted these streets and read a text about the demonstrations [*Class Struggle in Egypt 1945-1970* by Mahmoud Hussein]. Public space is a good tool to remember," said Öğrenci, who had recently traveled to Stockholm to show her works at Tensta Kunsthall, reminiscing as she enjoyed tea and conversation on a calm, breezy afternoon in the neighborhood around MARSistanbul when she received an invitation to show her work at the Gwangju Biennale in South Korea in September.

My idea was to start from the First World War to nowadays. The first work [*Fire Diaries* (2012-4)] is by Sibel Horada. There are ashes on the ground, on a black square, with nails. This is about the İzmir Fire. It is important because it was 1922, during the Turkish War of Independence. Almost at the end of the war İzmir was burnt to finish the war.

Öğrenci spoke generously about curating *Metaphorical Space* in her delightful voice and colorful presence that seems capable of uplifting even the heaviest of silences. She spotlighted Ankara's architectural landscape in the 1930s with the work of Özge Topçu, the decolonization movements of Cairo in the 1950s and the aftermath of military coup in Athens during the 70s with the videos of Louis Henderson and Halvadaki respectively. "The cities are a symbolic way of establishing time and space structures, place hierarchies, and forms of domination that are institutionalized and legitimized through the very structures," she recently wrote via personal correspondence.

Empathizing with refugee artists in Istanbul, Öğrenci met Ala and invited him to show his work at *Metaphorical Space* so that he could network more effectively within the downtown scene. She stands at the forefront of integration in Istanbul, driving efforts to embrace and cultivate Syrian artists seeking asylum on route from the Middle East to Europe. As early as 2014, she profiled Toufic Hamidi, Amjad Wardeh, Naser Nassan Agha among others in an essay for the bilingual magazine *Art Unlimited*, sensitively delivering the common sense of life in the city and country for people from Tehran to Riyadh, Baghdad to Gaza, considering the integral role that

Istanbul plays to encompass the entire region into its stable core, relatively strong and fit enough to carry the weight of its post-imperial history towards a brighter future where the feeling of being home and local identity has a wider base.

"Among the cultural centers of the East, Istanbul has become almost the only center where different people can live together. The tense and unstable relations among the Middle Eastern countries affect people's freedom of travel. [...] Given these circumstances, Istanbul, which is still a safe center, is bound to host all the refugees and help the artists, scientists, and intellectuals from the region heal," wrote Ögrenci, after many personable and creatively engaged studio visits with Syrian artists in the center-periphery of Istanbul where they live and socialize.

For all the artists, Istanbul, Damascus, and Aleppo all resemble one another. It is clear that they are not unfamiliar with the architectural elements and the urban planning of Istanbul. The oriental, unplanned development under the influence of communal relations and the process of modernization in the 20th century are common characteristics of oriental centers of culture and commerce such as Istanbul, Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo. [...] The artists indicated that the social life in Istanbul resembled their lives in Syria very much and that they felt home when shopping, ordering food, or walking in the streets although they could not speak Turkish.

Ala walked out of the underground exhibition space at MARSistanbul and looked up at a series of blurry photographs. Its faces are nearly obscured by a grainy effect. Only a pale, reclusive skin tone appears. The shut-in subjects observe the street below, as they did in 2012 by the *Agos Newspaper* building in Şişli to mark the fifth year death anniversary of Hrant Dink, the Armenian journalist who was assassinated outside of the offices where he worked at the minority newspaper. The photograph installation by Metehan Özcan is chilling. It conveys the fear of murder in broad daylight that continues to send shockwaves through the collective conscience of Turkey and the world. Ala lowered his gaze, and dappled more splashes of neon red and viridescent green onto a white leaf of paper. He watched the streets move, confident on his creative life path as a steady observer, despite his identity as a migrant. He stared back into the light reflecting off the passing cars that wind and whip through the narrow, cobblestone streets before returning behind the heavy, industrial door to descend below, immersing himself in the art of *Metaphorical Space*.

May 27, 11:50 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Maternal

A fashionable and confident woman walks in with a powerful stride, a bolt upright back and disarming poise through the sweeping, heavy doorway of the stylish, neighborhood gallery Pg Art, clicking her heels on the rough, pearly floor against walls that gleam in a baby blue so immaculate it's nearly transparent, its pale shade as devoid of shadow as the clearest of summer skies on those bright days when warm air is shot through with rays of heavenly fire purified by the emptiness of space beyond the earthly horizon.

She takes off one of her heels and lays it to rest on the tiles that reflect the flawless azure, where only the slightest, amorphous patches of spectral variation appear to the onlookers, who are unwavering as they stare at the irresistible, superlative bounty of female self-expression. They watch as she fades into the entrancing luster of the luminous, monochromatic background that is at once unpolished, left raw like the cloudless fortuity of an atmosphere unobscured by even a single tuft of moisture, and yet is entirely, deeply crafted. Eyes drift to the heel, golden through and through, a profound, substantial metallic blonde refined from the heart of the earth, and run with a sole strip of candy red up its dagger-thin stiletto.

They keep ogling her lost heel. In time, a buzzing of insect wings is heard approaching through the cerulean ether. A quartet of ladybugs land on her abandoned shoe. One climbs up the stiletto. Another lands, wings outspread, on the heel, as the other two, somehow larger yet still dainty, explore the point. The ladybugs are transfixed to the object whose aesthetic and purpose is kindred to the name they assume with natural authenticity. Elsa Ers stood the longest to capture the moment as it graced the collective subconscious, when she fished it out of the reaches of the imagination to arrange the feminine insect with a likely, though artificial friend from the human kingdom, a high heel. It is one of thirteen paintings that decorate the walls at Pg Art Gallery for her second solo show, *In Absentia*, to evoke a very human death of nature.

A white-tied waiter pulls back the woman's chair with a soft grin. He notices that she has lost one shoe but does not comment. "She must know," he thinks. And as she crosses the leg of her barefoot to her left, the waiter then notices her glistening pedicure, with toenail polish so fresh that it reflects the restaurant's natural light like a silver spoon, even as a grand mirror. Tablecloths are colored a milky blue and textured with a tickling, effervescent grain. Her fork is to the left, knife to the right, and her spoon is placed horizontally over the plate, a black and white weave of designs balanced delicately to open a space in the middle, where a large, multicolored beetle is served, paired with a couple of ladybugs. She cracks her toes by a tight clench of her foot and digs in with a broad smile.

Ers is looking at her from above. She paints the dish with a meticulous sense of detail and riveting color, though it is like an abstract object flung through outer space, motionless as it casts a shadow over the pale blue background. The woman, nowhere to be seen, asks for another fork. Its metalwork is more intricate than the one given to her on arrival, impressively engraved as delicately as wood with the f-holes of a classical violin. She raises the filigree handle by pressing

her pointer finger against her thumb to pierce the beetle after dousing it in pink cream and a halved strawberry. The lights go out around her and all is pitch dark except for the glimmering rainbow exoskeleton of the beetle and the gilded utensil fit for royalty.

She has really come for dessert. Her greed is shared by the world, as she sits alone wishing that she could eat and buy everything. She looks across the restaurant toward the entrance and espies a dragon-like fish immersed in blue light, attracted to a glass marble in which the colors of its electric indigo body and florid ginger tail are reflected. "It is Narcissus," she tells herself, imagining the mythical personification of selfishness, long submerged in the waters of its visual echo where it has ever spent lifetimes looking at itself. "I am in beautiful company," she thinks.

So, she orders a cake. The first slice comes flying with four lively monarch butterflies delighting on the ruffles of frosting. Her total field of vision behind the thick slice and over the vegetal-designed china plate transforms into a camouflage design, of coral, aquamarine and beige colorations. Two small fish float through the air and steal a knowing, almost judgmental glance at her. She is uncomfortable with the whole situation and orders another slice, something different. It soon arrives on an identical plate, a shallow bowl crested with gold at the lip and painted with thin, green leaves. The butterflies have flown away, and to replace them, a hybrid creature in the form of a hummingbird and mosquito swoops down to taste the frosting. And a new fish also swims over, now gawking at her wide-eyed, innocent and half-frightened. The cake is made of raw meat. Despite the background giving way to a simple tint of spacious, pearly gray, she is uncomfortable and does not even look at her fork, never mind take a bite.

She returns home before late, looks in the mirror, and readies herself to sleep. Her dream is unsettling. The walls of her bedroom dim to total darkness. She hears a voice say, "You are what you eat." It is on repeat, like a chant, only somehow played from a shot, vintage turntable. And then, a la Kafka, she feels her legs as the sharp, awkward limbs of a bug. Her eyes are kaleidoscopic, opening to the world through a honeycomb of lenses. It is dizzying, and more, the ground beneath her writhes with a slimy, reflective sheen. A massive constrictor slithers under her every crawling step and then she looks up, and the world is glowing. A school of phosphorescent jellyfish wanders in a spontaneous mass. She is lucid and seeks a way up from the lightless ocean floor.

Ers painted the snake as it rose from the watery depths to twist around the stalk of a purple flower only to peer out above the canopy of petals to spy a fish of similar hue, of the Tyrian variety long attained from mollusks and worn by the ancient rulers of Byzantium. The spotted, leathery scales of her serpents are photo-real, deceiving the eye, touched with shade and coiled around the olive-green stem. There is a feeling of mystic ascension to her works, especially the circular disks where human forearms appear out of opaque paint lathered liberally, though with careful attention to the smoothness of her colored continuity. The beetle, fish and butterfly emerge into a vision from sacred orbs, raised and offered to the spirit of the muse.



And others woke from the nightmare born in 1915 to the public imagination from Prague, the "metamorphosis" that changed novels, writing and thinking. She listens to Kafka outstretched over a floral wallpaper backdrop, adorned with a stork origami accessory, traversing the abstract space that leads into an emerald forest of domestic perennials and sugar-coated, candied fruit. She takes on yet a new form, as a viridescent, jeweled beetle walking lightly over a pile of rainbow gummy worms.

"Painting in this instance is more a way for me to sort my feelings and create a commentary. There's definitely something instinctual about the way I work," Ers wrote via personal correspondence, as she looks for meaning and concept in her artwork after completion for a more objective take, recently switching to non-toxic acrylic while working from home with her daughter close by, leading to her exploration of more vibrant colors.

It's going to sound extremely plain and simple, but more so than anything else, motherhood has taken away my time and my patience. Not having enough time — though it seems contradictory — was a positive influence. Suddenly I didn't have enough time to wonder, ponder, have bouts of crippling self-doubt, all of which are common in the process of making art.

"*In Absentia* was more a personal evaluation of my own struggles with motherhood than a feminist statement. But a large part of that struggle is due to being a woman in the Middle East. Up until I moved to Tel Aviv, I lived in metropolises, specifically ones that don't have enough room for nature. Istanbul has long been fighting a losing battle to preserve its greenery. Israel, in that aspect, was a complete novelty for me," wrote Ers, a Turkish-Jewish painter who thinks that Palestinians are the best artists in the region.

I'm a complete city girl at heart, but I tend to escape to nature when things get too hectic in my head and I need a break. I'm fascinated by animals, especially by exotic insects as of late. My work is influenced by my upbringing and past in Istanbul than my current life in Tel Aviv. I'm still figuring it all out, and that exploration process ends up as paintings.

June 3, 1:17 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Mesopotamia

The howling sky roars over the tarmac touched with burning phoenixes yearning for a sight of moonlit stone and eastern sunlight. Heaven has fallen to whip green faces with the dry air, cleansing them of memory and home, as they traverse the prehistoric grain fields where civilization began, and climb the steep, exposed quarries that lead to the apex of its mining, toward the storied city of Mardin.

Inside its solemn Assyrian haunts storytellers chant in a nearly extinct Neo-Aramaic language neighboring Chaldean symbols, conversing in Arabic and Kurdish against an urban sea of dark red wines that overflow along the main drag lined and twisting with nine historic venues, often half-preserved and all-but-abandoned, opened for locals and ramblers to gape with sore jaws and misty eyes into new visions of art.

Patient seekers are led to voyage through the psychological spaces where lost time and environmental transformation confronts the all-encompassing presence of human resilience as sheer as the cliff that rises with a dense mass of ancient dwellings.

Fifty artists from around the world converged to capture themes instilled by the collective mind of curators Fırat Arapoğlu, Nazlı Gürlek, and Derya Yücel to go *Beyond Words*.

It opens into what the American author Hakim Bey called a temporary, autonomous zone, a creative ecosystem sustaining alternate dimensions where experienced reality and remembered history bend over backward like the immense Mesopotamian flatland atop the curved planet to reveal a horizon unseen, cast in the fog of tragedy behind its white curtain of haze to Syria, awaiting thunderous lightning showers amid constant winds that drown reason in the ecstatic inspiration of the moment under the mask of the muse.

In the Orientalist romance, *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje, published in 1992, the enigmatic leading man woos his reluctant temptress while taking shelter inside a jeep during a raging sandstorm in the middle of the Sahara Desert.

He does so by citing the many winds that storm throughout the region, enunciating local names and the legends that accompany with guttural words that roll from his tongue like exotic delicacies, sweetening her ears and lulling them both to sleep in the eye of a deadly storm. He speaks of eternal winds, and other gusts more pathless and transient, subject to the directionless whims of the open plain, as over the mythically fertile soil of Mesopotamia, bordered by the Anatolia plateaus above and the infinite deserts below.

It is there where the scorching permanence of the *aref* blows from Syria in the south to meet the feared currents of the *samiel* from Turkey, said to carry a poisonous air so potent that it was equally coveted ally and formidable opponent on the battlefield, while loyal only to its vast, encircling power.

Such was a logic that escaped the Germans, couched in the forests of Europe until they sided with the Ottoman Empire in World War I and by 1917 had set up shop in the nineteenth century İskender Atamayan Mansion on the central thoroughfare through Mardin, where Mustafa Kemal Pasha also garrisoned.

Now, a casual walker through its confines will stumble over bare rock walls, dust-strewn floors, the skeleton of a building run through with exposed electricity cables that act like visible hints for scavenging hunters following the tail of the white rabbit into hallways shrouded in darkness, and finally the glare of a video screen.

*Infinite Distance* (2018) by Çağrı Saray is an immediate reflection of the roads taken in Mardin, mostly on foot through its labyrinthine wormhole of stairs that seem hewn by hand from builders centuries past, as an ambient noise effect moves the fading clips to the ominous sounds of a deep sonic rush and a slow hammering onto the omnipresent stone. His focus is on the architectural feature known as the *Abbara*, an integral piece of the puzzle that is the mineral megalith of the city in its unified entirety.

Splayed throughout some four stories of dereliction and disintegration, one of the more calculated subjects is *Smokeless Air Space* (2018) by İnel İnal, in the style of a documentary sympathetic to the life of multigenerational tobacco farmers in the Gurs Valley of Kızıltepe southwest from the city of Mardin. In the span of three years he produced the piece after simply listening to a young man who offered him a cigarette. That most basic gesture spurred him to see his village, to record the changing traditions of manual labor that had been passed down for generations.

As part of the installation, fiery neon-red words read, "My Head" and "My Eye" in Turkish, placed on stacks of dried tobacco leaves still fresh with the scent of its raw, unprocessed form. Another piece at the Biennial, shown at the ramshackle Mor Efrem Monastery, is titled *Why Look at Animals? Agrimika* (2015) by the Greek artist Maria Papadimitrou. It grasps at similar motifs, only in the context of the dying leather industry from the perspective of one of its last lifelong technicians in the city of Volos.

There is a thick must of nostalgia that wafts from the worn mugs of old men whose vacant stares speak of the multifaceted interrelationship between work and mortality, which together take on bold, fresh meaning when exhibited in places that barely exist, fractured and lingering with forgotten pasts.

"My work is about body politics, exploring the body both as a site of regulation subjected to systemic regimes and ways in which it sets itself free. I am a curator who likes to bring art to people in places that are not necessarily designated as art spaces. We brought very complicated installation and video pieces to Mardin. Consequently in the complete absence of real supporting technical infrastructure we curators worked hands-on to install the pieces together with one

electrician and a small team of young helpers," wrote curator Nazlı Gürlek via personal correspondence as she reflected on the monthlong biennial.

Mardin gives the opportunity to think outside of the box, outside of the established art institutions, and to invent new creative ways to reach audiences. Considering Mardin's multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and multi-layered history and daily life, I suggest that due attention be given to the language of the human body as a common denominator and the most truthful, sincere, and direct form of expression. The physical, spiritual, symbolic, and instinctive aspects of the body can be invested in as possible strategies of empowerment.

There is a powerful aesthetic dialogue at play between the multimedia installations and the historic architecture. Hasan Tur's *Memory as Resistance* (2017) is projected onto chipped and peeling walls, the interior decay at the Mor Efram Monastery, which makes for an ambient complement to the piece itself, a three-and-a-half hour exercise in repetitious minimalism, crumpling and smoothing pictures of assassinated journalists into a deliberate meditation on subversive remembrance. And around the corner, Seyhun Topuz freezes the ordeal into the present tense for her abstract sculptures, *Crumpled up Paper* (2017), curated to furnish the empty, long-condemned holy sanctum.

Back at the German Headquarters, the cartoonist Ramize Erer created *To Peace* (2018) suspended along walls discolored with patches of rotted paint for a common palette that is eerily similar to hers. Hasan Pehlevan's interventions are akin to Mardin's stony, illusive foreground while the paintings of Mahmut Celayir reveal the inner psyche of its supernatural magnetism.

"Artworks such as those by Senem Gökçe Oğultekin featuring two dancers at the historical town of Ani [*Dun (Home)*, 2018], a water ritual at Hasankeyf in praise of peace and nature by Fırat Bingöl [*O Water*, 2017] and inscriptions of artist Ana Mendieta's body in the Cuban landscape transformed by the basic elements of nature such as fire, earth, air, and water [*Birth*, 1981], can help us imagine new ways of responding to the diversity of issues of urgency within the social framework. We currently live in a global world order composed of conflicting local-global dynamics, where single viewpoints have long lost their dominance and diversity has become the new norm," wrote Gürlek, whose sensitivity to the greater social context only strengthens her curatorial statements.

Mardin and its biennial must be seen within this broad global perspective. The unique quality of this biennial among all the worlds' biennials is its political and cultural location enclosing so much beauty, conflict and pain. It stands out as an Anatolian contemporary art event taking place in a small town in the southeastern region of modern Turkey overlooking the fertile plains of ancient Mesopotamia, just 21 kilometers from the border with Syria and the entire Middle Eastern region beyond it; a land of deep-rooted madrasas, mosques, monasteries and churches.

May 31, 11:55 AM  
Mardin, Turkey

## Oil

The toxic fumes of turpentine rose through Sokol's nostrils as she exhaled smoke from the last of her countless cigarettes. She was going crazy, and needed a break. Outside the door to the vast, working theater where she lived, the streets of Paris tempted to embalm her in its open-air museum. Her art was then a heavily concentrated chaos of densely overlapping transparent layers, as she looked through metaphysical lattice works of oil, painting on painting. That changed when a fire burst and she lost her home and her work. She covered a burnt canvas in ashen gray, and began figurative portraiture, a craft that remains her signature.

As she stepped out into the breezy air along the Seine, the poet Lale Müldür passed into her field of vision, famous for her shock of citrus hair and impulsive candor, and for the peerless verse that echoes in the neo-folk music of Yeni Türkü and the French painting of Colette Deble. Her social circles introduced Sokol to a bearded merrymaker named Boysan, who, three years after his passing, recaptured her inspiration for a new painting now in the works in Istanbul, a city fast becoming her second home. She has since stayed well past her opening at The Pill to work in a new studio and pursue her first love: oil painting.

Unibrowed and ravishing, Sokol is as passionate in the merging of her oils with intimates as she is whip-smart on the course of art history, with a special eye on feminist painters like the Baroque master Artemisia Gentileschi, who survived torture and rape before succeeding, beyond centuries of patriarchal neglect, to enjoy an unrivaled legacy. All of her figures are of people she's found, loved, and chased. The exhibition title, *I have trouble sleeping, but she said she loved me* is from a line in a poem by her fiancé, the French-Bedouin poet and artist Azzedine Saleck.

For her largest piece on display at The Pill, *La Nuit* (2018), Saleck is portrayed lovelorn, as she directly quotes the *The Night* (1889/90) by the nineteenth century Swiss painter Ferdinand Hodler. Its common motifs see the artist's self-portrait in repetition, lying on a geometry of beds and limbs with jealous partners and many lovers. Hodler himself referenced an earlier painting, *The Nightmare* (1781) by Henry Fuseli, the Swiss-English painter who lived as the Enlightenment peaked.

"Referring to other painters from the past is the painter's vocabulary. I work like that a lot. I think every painter does. Turks say that every language has a personality. Painting also has personality. Painting is also a personality," said Sokol, as she lit up the bold whitewash at The Pill, telling stories as bewitching as her works with an infectious, irresistible energy.

I use the models that inspire me. If you paint someone, you paint someone that you love. It can be love at first sight. In art history, painters who have models in their studio love them, or get married to them even.

The Pill's founding gallerist Suela Cennet curated *I have trouble sleeping, but she said she loved me* with a potent touch. Opened in 2016, the space beams so brightly that Sokol was compelled to fix and complete her most recent works under its powerful lighting. Its longest wall is decked with seven figures: *Dina* (2016), *Salome* (2017), *Bonnie - Cennie* (2017), *Anouk* (2018), *Ines* (2018), *Odessa* (2018), *Nout* (2018). The women subjects are pictured against contrasting, geometric backgrounds that range from darker to lighter shades as they increasingly recline until finally, *Nout* bends over backwards.

Sokol's body-positive, multiracial canvases inject a welcome influx of worldly, pluralist liberalism into the Istanbul scene, a quality that Cennet has advanced with her keen ear on the ground while often in Paris. Her last show *Tapestry from an Asteroid* with Raphael Barontini, for example, similarly captured the realism that Hodler crafted, and that the nineteenth century French painter Gustave Courbet later led. Sokol, following a kindred path beside Parallelism, adapted a detail from his *Le Sommeil* (1866) for her piece, *Anouk*.

"Personally, I think I'm very organic. When it comes to painting, I try to do something that is open and fluid. Then I change it suddenly. Even the bodies that I paint are not sensual. It's not a love scene, because the bodies are geometrical. They're harsh, not like real women, but manikin dolls. That's my psyche. It's a metaphysical space. It's not actual life," said Sokol, citing the visual style of the twentieth century Italian artist and writer Giorgio de Chirico.

For painters to talk about their paintings is complicated. There's the whole personal story, aspects, colors, but the most important thing is tension, between the elements, colors, and techniques. It's all about the relationship between the elements in a piece that makes for good work.

After hosting the cosmopolitan wanderings of Lale Müldür at her legendary theater home in Paris, she also put up such international luminaries as Oksana Shachko, an icon painter and feminist leader. Despite celebrating her common Eastern European culture as the daughter of Poles, she discovered that it is among Turks where she has felt most warmly embraced by fellow creatives. After years of friendship, Müldür attended her May 25 opening at The Pill in high style, eccentric as ever as she spontaneously joined locals for Ramadan breakfast outside the gallery in the smoggy patches of green that divide the inner-city thruway along the Golden Horn.

"The artists and poets of the Turkish, Istanbul scene invited me to come five years ago for a month. Suela didn't have the gallery yet, but she was with a gallery in Paris. When she finally opened The Pill, she asked to work with me. It made sense. It was love at first sight. At the opening, Lale took me by the hand, talked about the paintings and conceived a poem. Maybe we'll do a book together," said Sokol, whose fascination for Turkey, especially its underground art and cultural expression, has only grown on her more and more.

There are two shows that I'm really proud of; this one, and the one I did in Copenhagen [in 2016, titled *Sabbath* at Andersen's Contemporary]. I'll keep working with these galleries. Choosing a

gallery is like marriage. You have to understand each other. Suela and The Pill want my work to exist. She will fight for it.

"I always knew I was a painter. When I was a child I made drawings and sold them on the street. When I was sixteen I escaped from home and went to the school of Joseph Beuys in Düsseldorf. It's a school for German painting. I was not in the school because I was too young but I was hanging out there, painting with the students," said Sokol, as she points to her work *Bonnie - Cennie* and reveals the model as her best friend in the shape of an hourglass, as a reference to the painting *Silvana Cenni* by the early twentieth century Italian artist Felice Casorati.

The texture of oil itself is pigment. It's not like acrylic, or synthetics. Oil paint is made with all natural elements so the pigment constantly reacts with the atmosphere. This is why we keep oil paintings for so long, in museums and so on. There is a whole story on the medium itself and time. There is a physical attraction to these colors. It's so strong. Look!

June 7, 4:28 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Tunnel

The lights of Paris burned on the horizon as they flickered in the mind of the artist and filmmaker Sena Başöz, sparking her thoughts into ideas to conceive new pieces for her residency at Cite International des Arts, where she designed to research alternative methods of trauma healing.

The project began after she produced her video, *Doctoring* (2010), a twelve-minute meditation on the friction point where the body touches the world. It opens with a seemingly uncomfortable close-up on scraped flesh delicately bandaged, only the arm is soon revealed as a photograph. The artist then proceeds to dress various images, actual physical developments of film removed from the frame one by one until finally, the background reality is unveiled as a basic, nondescript, flat and colorless surface.

While studying film and video at the prestigious and countrified Bard College in upstate New York, her distinguished professor and fellow artist Cecilia Dougherty turned her on to the experimental narrative styles of Georges Perec, the wild-haired French novelist and star child of the art world for his linguistic trickery. His eccentric literary remembrances of his parents' death in World War II, and the details of his survival as a child in war-torn Europe are distilled by Başöz as "describe your street, describe another". He is most famously known for entirely avoiding the most common vowel in the French language, the letter "e", in his novel, translated in 1994 as *A Void* by Gilbert Adair (originally published in 1969), to imply the Holocaust indirectly by means of a detective story.

"All of the pieces in the exhibition [*On Lightness*] are about healing and getting lighter. Some were inspired by very heavy events, by life and death, even the afterlife and the idea that nothing really dies. Nothing that has happened is lost to history," wrote Başöz in a recent correspondence as she travels between appointments teaching contemporary art classes at Boğaziçi University with a reputation for exhibiting works from Experimental Field Tokyo to Cannes Film Festival among other venues of note.

In the dimming light leading up to the second floor at Depo, a framed piece of paper is tacked to the wall just above the last stairway step at about knee-level. It is, *Mobility* (2017). The work is almost unnoticeable, and all the more faint is the simple drawing on it, etched in pale graphite. It is an elementary sketch of boxes propped up together like a puzzle fit into place, all rolling along on top slight fixtures of tiny wheels. The drawing has a most curious effect as a curious pair of eyes will peer in through the hefty, industrial wooden architecture of the warehouse interior and see a transparent pile of rectangles. The related piece is *Boxes* (2017) made of metal and nets in various dimensions.

"Sometimes things resolve slowly and gradually in life. There are also sudden epiphanies. For me, the transparent boxes are a "what if?," like a change of paradigm. Heavy closed boxes could also be light and transparent like this. Since my exhibition is on lightness I only put the light boxes this time in the Depo space," said Başöz about her production, initially for the Sharjah



Biennial's offsite project *Bahar* in Istanbul, which started with her going to the hardware store to buy cardboard boxes and then trying to transform and resolve them with water, but after failing she ended up with what she calls ghost boxes.

The drawing, *Mobility*, can be read as an explanation as to what happened to the heavy cardboard boxes. They are more mobile now. The boxes can also be read as how the human mind reads the world, categorizes and groups. Being light and transparent is about being able to move beyond analytical thinking, and the fragility of analytical thinking.

Başöz is the daughter of a retired medical surgeon, whose medical screen, purchased in 1982, stands to reflect the projection of her video, *Screen* (2016), commissioned by the SPOT Production Fund. In her visionary way, she ventured beyond the field of scientific analysis as it exists in her family, into the more nebulous, intuitive realms of art, especially that of the fluid elements of chance in video and film. And yet, as she says in the context of her work, *Boxes*, what is moved can also come back.

She returns to visions of her upbringing, literally touching on her personal history with the luminous hand of a virtual skeleton floating across the Aegean Sea. It is a visual device that she filmed in the summer of 2015 in the İzmir province of Çeşme to raise her voice, as so many countless have done, about the refugee crisis that has raged across Turkey towards Europe since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, and which with a healthy knowledge of life on the planet, is understood in continuity with the greater, ongoing saga of human movement, and in the context of biological evolution since time immemorial.

"The sea is the source of life. I see this video as an ultimate unification, as human body parts are dispersed on the sea. The white bones and human body parts are cut out from an anatomy atlas. They float on the surface of the sea. There are playful moments like when the spine acts like a fish," said Başöz, who shot the video as refugees crossed from Çeşme to the Greek island of Chios.

I trust that nature will regenerate itself. Healing requires privacy. Organisms heal on their own. In the long run, nature will obtain a balance.

*On Lightness* reaches profound heights in the impressive scope of *Forough* (2018), hundreds of bird portraits created via digital print on tracing paper. The work has a kinetic aspect including fans that oscillate to blow air against the pages as they flap under the artificial wind, stuck fast to the bare wall of the exhibition space.

In the true fashion of Depo, the art makes a critical reference to social history. Başöz set her sights on the Hafıza Merkezi-Memory Center (in English, the Truth Justice Memory Center), an independent, human rights organization founded by lawyers and journalists in November of 2011 in Istanbul to enlighten the issues that beset post-conflict regions.

The concept began as a smaller piece with a single fan, and then expanded when Başöz received an invitation to show *Doctoring and Wild Mammals of Turkey* (2009) at the *Capsule* exhibition in Istanbul's Saint Joseph High School, eventually collaborating with its Natural History Museum, which preserves the oldest and largest collection of flora and fauna taxidermy in Turkey. The museum allowed public visitation for the first time during the exhibition's run, granting Başöz permission to draw the birds for her work. She produced the stunning number of animal portraits with a prolific vitality, all while immersed in the enchanting displays of winged beasts.

"Initially the starting point of the work was about lost lives, lives whose freedoms were taken away, lives lost while their stories are limited only to portrait photography. When the museum accepted my request, it also became about the afterlife of an archive, and reversing the colonial look at nature which categorizes, and names," said Başöz, who is planning her next artistic vision around the ideas of healing and archival representation.

I don't hide that its industrial fans that make photographs of dead birds fly. I don't hide that *Feet* (2018) is carved out of styrofoam. If you look up close to *Eraser* (2018), you will notice two bird portraits from *Forough* flying with a mini fan attached to the ceiling. I want to make a small gesture that proves that these birds can really fly about 150 years after their death.

"There is the piece called *Ivy* (2018). It is three images cropped from a personal photograph. On the original photo there is me as a baby on my grandma's lap and my mom by her side. Three generations of women. The ivy in the picture is a common ivy that exists in many households. It is a very strong and adaptable plant. It can regrow and regenerate if you cut pieces from it and it survives in plain water, in addition to soil," wrote Başöz.

This piece is about regeneration, life and death and the passing of womanhood through generations. I believe my grandmother is like an ivy planted in soil. So is my mom. My generation experiences a different kind of womanhood. We are inheriting tradition but we live away from the land of our ancestors. We adapt to new circumstances and transform tradition just like this plant surviving with our roots in water. The plant is doing really well in the exhibition space. It's healthy and has grown almost 15-20 centimeters since the show opened.

June 24, 4:16 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Topsy-Turvy

It opens with a silvery hourglass of a tower, and then cuts. All movement slows in its hyper-real, Anthropocene world born of cyberspace, where time is halved and the once-parallel evolutions of humankind and the animal kingdom have long divorced beyond reckoning. A team of shameless, metrosexual oil riggers orchestrate a spill, holding pipes gushing with a computer-generated black fluid that floods the stairwell in the shadow of the lone, flat-topped skyscraper. Dressed in the reflective vests of street workers, they are next seen tossing trash about until the flung pieces lose gravity and float, revolving around the cylindrical building wherein a corporate, executive board meeting sits air-headed and ponderous.

The introductory music bursts with a powerful interpretation of the late nineteenth century composition by the French composer, Leon Boellmann, a sweeping opus of Christian mysticism, his most popular work, titled *Suite Gothic* (1895). Together with the inexplicably unsettling, crystal-clear menagerie of images, the *Suite* rises with a cascading intensity, as its evocative sound then rushes fast to a halt as the camera looks down to frame just the feet of the executives for a curious close-up. It pictures the ideal heights of the twenty-first century workplace representing a comprehensive spectrum of global, human diversity.

Blinking with the faces of the continents, from Eurasia through Africa, they seem to be passing time in utter boredom. One fiddles with a fountain pen. Another stares into space. Behind them, the glass elevator is raised, and out walks a stream of people of an entirely different kind of diversity, a bounty of mixed economic and faith orientations. Entering the boardroom, they are not mere suits, but a turbaned man, a scantily clad woman, a New Age priestess, a robed monk, and they have come to assume those most enviable, high, brown leather seats, to replace the corporatized with an ease beyond nonviolence. It is an almost mechanical change of the guard, where nothing actually changes.

There is not the slightest hint of animosity between the divergent groups. It happens simply as a play of musical chairs, and to a grand, ingenious soundtrack. Maurice Ravel's virtuosic *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major* (1929-1930) bubbles to a froth, as it blooms with a shuddering magnificence, contrasted with the plain, undramatic acting of the people who stand against the omnipresent green screens of *Inverso Mundus*. Lev Evzovich, an artist at AES+F, explained the idea behind the film in a 2016 interview with Barcelona's SENDA Gallery. He said that its metaphors are steeped in the European tradition of engraving, especially in the medieval era with its characteristic fantasies, where both in the film and in the age-old art, to imagine a donkey riding a man is not entirely out of the ordinary. In collaborating with Tatiana Arzamasova and Evgeny Svyatsky, the artist collective AES+F drummed up a categorical overthrow of both the contemporary and historic mind.

"Usually, a number of different short stories can be seen on one single sheet narrating the tale of how the order of everything in the world, the entire world order, has been disturbed," said Svyatsky, as he detailed the filmmakers' adaptation from a particular genre of sixteenth century

engraving known as the *World Upside Down* in which social roles are reversed and the fairytale imagination steps onto center stage. "We have brought some of them to life. We have realized them in today's world," said Arzamasova.

The film continues, and to some of the most inventive classical music ever conceived, exemplified by the choice of Franz Liszt's *Mazeppa* (1851-1854) from his unthinkably complex and startlingly beautiful *Transcendental Etudes*. Its range stretches the limits of pianistic technical ability to almost pure abstraction, and to the visual theme of total contrast, as those who were posed on high descend to those littered below. A most gorgeous and powerful businesswoman upfront lavishes herself with a selfie.

They languish on the street, as they had in the office, and show themselves baldly, without pretense, as every stripe of color and expression that issues from the human mind through choice of clothing, and all forms of outward belief and guise of personality. The motion never quickens, it is always to cut time, and filmed with a glossy sheen, before backgrounds fished from the digital void. The actors are fully lit, silent, moved by some great power beyond. And the opposing peoples mix as the music transitions into a down tempo feel with Tchaikovsky's meditative piano work, *The Doll's Funeral* (1878). It is at that point when floating composites of fictive animal creatures fly from the gray, overcast sky to mingle with the people. Bat-winged and octopus-legged dogs, and eagle-winged rats descend in the wildest agglomerations of vestigial external organs of fins and feathers, scales and snouts.

Next, the film turns upside down, literally, as a scene begins underground in a room of green tiles and glimmering hooks. A standing pig flays a man hung by his feet. And a surge of red liquid dyes the sparkingly clean floors. Meanwhile, on ground level, between massive cargo shipping boxes painted in subdued greens and blues, a host of men are prodded behind individualized prison cells made of wood. The women poke at them with conductors' batons, docile and innocent. Everything ensues with the delicacy and lightness of a ballet, as ladies dressed for polite society then patiently fix the men into upturned stockades of wooden planks. Industrial pincers are waved over them, and no one flinches. It is a human world devoid of human emotion.

Everyone is beautiful, dazzlingly dressed, and sharp as nails. The men are rolled back along the exterior of a kind of hamster wheel, to graze against cartoonish, metal spikes. Ever so deliberately, they are turned around the mechanical device. Yet, no one has the look of torture, nor of pain. It is with a completely numb subservience that the men allow themselves to be stockaded again and again, as the women mechanically lower the shackles that could very well fit in a sleek, boutique furniture showroom. Suddenly, the women are distracted by gently disarming moments of grace with the flock of crossbred animals whose hybrid bodies are fetched so far into the netherworlds of unreality as to prompt unrestrained cackling.

The music picks up again, from the famous adagio to Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major the *Casta Diva* aria from the Bellini opera *Norma* (1831) set to a farcical boxing match enacted as a conflict of the generations, where the old and the young face off, forming opposite fronts.

The people seem to act in slow motion, not merely from the effects of post-production, as the children win by a show of deadpan force, observed by a global community of onlookers. Only a single child is defeated, laid to rest against the wood floors as the white-haired, wrinkly victor places her foot on his chest. But an older group of youth, adolescents then storm through, invading a gilded, red palace crawling with police in multiple units, in riot gear and street uniforms. Instead of confronting in a violent altercation, they together commingle as in a harem, over a plush, curtained bed in the middle of a royal room furnished with polished stone busts and glowing chandeliers, but the light never changes throughout the entire film. A woman in sports apparel is caressed by a twosome of older policemen. Gender, race, occupation, every last distinction that exists within humankind dissolves.

The romantic scene ascends into the clouds, on a flying bed, as the highly evolved, composite creatures circle in an acrobatic dance in the sky. The music becomes heavier, more dramatic, furnished with sound design by Dmitry Morozov aka VTOL, when a totally novel class of otherworldly beings come down to earth, digital renderings shaped into schools of massive, airborne jellyfish. Increasingly, the peopled cityscape is revealed as a zero-gravity environment when a woman opens her hand to see that she is finned. The film ends with rapt in an apocalyptic ambiance, as figments of cybernetic alien life rain down on what remains human of the deceptively human world.

"Why has this become interesting?" asks Evzovich of AES+F. "Maybe because this is a contemporary topic of questions about the world's values, which can change very rapidly. And they are changing as we understand them." To which his colleague Arzamasova adds: "All the joys of rampant capitalism, consumption, multiculturalism, etc., are receding and are being replaced, not by something reminiscent of the splendid baroque, but rather the medieval period."

June 28, 4:35 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Everlasting

It must have been some kind of storage cellar, for the musty Italian wines of the Dark Ages, beside the rotting cheeses of Anatolia and the flea-bitten rugs that had come in unkempt heaps from the sprawling reach of the Silk Road, all crawling with the sable rats that would hitch free rides to Genoa as the late Byzantine colony built the Galata Tower in 1348. It was only two years prior when the Black Plague began to spread after a nameless, haunting spell wafted in from the east, annihilating over half of Europe.

Though, it appears more elaborate than mere, empty space purposed to store the goods and wares of old. There are finely built arches, multiple rooms, long hallways and a raised, central platform. It lights well and the ceilings are high. Most contemporaries confess blissful ignorance as to the origin stories of the basement under the chic hotel restaurant Adahan, which is generally loved by locals and foreigners alike for its spectacular panoramas of the ancient megalopolis, where the towers of New Rome and the islands in the Sea of Marmara offer powerful visual delights.

"I'm a painter, but twenty years ago I opened my first gallery and art institute in Iran, in the really small city of Bushehr close to the Persian Gulf. We didn't even have electricity, water," said Tima Jam, the Istanbul-based Iranian curator of *Immortality* at Adahan, and founder of the arts agency Blue Rhino.

My father said that he didn't want me to be a painter, and I had to be a doctor or an engineer. I tried electronic engineering and didn't like it. I graduated in computer science. This was my first bachelor's degree. My second bachelor's degree was in fine arts, at an online university from Tehran.

Jam left Iran for Malaysia to pursue an MBA in art management, where she would learn the role of art in multimedia campaigns stimulating new entrepreneurial businesses. After that she went to Armenia, followed by Croatia, where she lived for a year while preparing to continue her studies in art management as a Ph.D. candidate in Amsterdam, for which she had earned an enviable scholarship. It was then when she came to Turkey, by accident.

The catch was that she had to apply for her Schengen visa from Iran. On route to Tehran via an indirect flight with a layover in Istanbul, she missed her flight. To pass the time, she struck up a conversation with fellow Turkish travelers in the smoking lounge. They made a lasting impression on her as they spoke amorously about the glories of Istanbul, emphasizing that she must see it for herself. Finally, after waiting and hearing more about the wonders of the great Turkish metropolis from other passersby, she boarded a flight back to Iran, where they denied her visa. She would never get her Ph.D. from Amsterdam, and back in Zagreb, her residency was about to expire.

"I went to Zagreb and grabbed everything. I came to Istanbul to stay for three months, started my doctorate here, and finished in strategy management at Yeditepe University. Two years ago I

opened my company Blue Rhino, organizing exhibitions, competitors, and residences. If someone is looking for artwork or an artist, we promote our artists," said Jam, as she sat amid the luxurious cityscape vistas on the top-floor bistro at Adahan, looking back at an active career in Istanbul where, among many other shows, she curated the recent exhibition of Iranian artists at Space Debris in May, titled *Beautiful Death*.

Iranians have less opportunity to travel than other nationalities. We like to keep our tradition. For example, we respect family, grandparents, like when someone older enters we stand up, to keep the manners and customs.

Jam chose Adahan's underground gallery specifically because of the theme of the exhibition, for its immortal ambiance. It has an energy that transcends death. She decided not to open a fixed gallery in Istanbul. Instead, her curation is often site-specific, as installations of artworks set to particular places in the city that accord with the concepts of her creative designs. Part of the deathless vision of her current show is based on how Adahan's architecture merges with the impressive renovation of the historic space.

"It's old and it's continuing, like infinity. In terms of the place itself, I had to make a show here, and I had in my mind, immortality. If I want to open a gallery, I can. I'm not interested in opening a gallery. My startup company concept is about making events anywhere, especially in places that are not well known as galleries," said Jam, who appreciates the Genoese heritage of the Adahan building, and its present transformation as a center for contemporary art.

The rhino is a symbol of strength for me, and in my culture, there is a saying, 'strong as a rhino' because of its thick skin.

"In different ways, all of the artists show how they're fighting to continue to live, even if they are not always successful," said Jam, who partnered with CAMA (Contemporary and Modern Art) Gallery, based in Iran and London.

Saeed Asadi painted a sofa, which has a story behind it, where it passed from generation to generation. Ali Motamedian showed infinity with a historical tower in Iran, and Dariush Hosseini with crickets that attack a farm, destroying it. But at the same time when you look at the painting, it is full of light.

Blue Rhino represents some 2,000 artists from all over the world, from Malaysia to Croatia, India, China, Italy, Spain. Many of them are from Iran and Turkey. It is the result of Jam's voracious appetite for discovery in her twenty years of working and traveling in the fields of art production, exhibition and appreciation. She knows many of the artists in the *Immortality* show personally, though there are a few recent acquisitions, for example, the very young painter Ferhat Salman, from the village of Kızıltepe in the district of Mardin. He had a show at the affordable, pro-youth art fair, Mamut Art Project, where Jam met him, and also another of her *Immortality*

artists, the sculptor Görkem Usta, whose piece sold on the first day and is on its way to a collection in San Francisco.

"Firstly, we wanted the show to be contemporary. When you are curating, the place of the artwork has a reason," said Jam, who arranged the pieces to have a sense of action, where, for instance, the mixed technique work of Gökhan Deniz, *Ses Çıkarma* (Utterance, 2012) stands next to Dilara Mataracı's painting *Sonsuzluk* (Eternity, 2015); the former silencing the sleepy air for an infant in its mother's arms in the latter.

Iranian and Turkish cultures are close. They have a hard situation, and they both try so hard to continue life. There are similarities in their ways of life. If you go back in history, you see that Iranian and Turkish people have fought to be alive, and they don't give up.

Most of the Turkish artists are well known, such as Mustafa Horasan, Seydi Murat Koç, Barış Sarıbaşı and Gülveli Kaya, who is head of the Fine Arts Department at Yeditepe University. Most are university lecturers, including the Iranian artists, and the average age is close to forty. The Iranian artists are known in Iran, with the exception of a few world-class names like the abstract painter Reza Hosseini. About thirty percent were taken from the artists' collections, while seventy percent were newly made, many in the current year.

The artists, being generally established in their practices and styles, were not poised to contribute something truly new aesthetically, technically, conceptually. But that isn't the point of *Immortality*. Jam conceived the show to advance the intercultural blend, Iranian and Turkish, visualizing it as a whole, shared expression through art, regardless of politics, religion, or tradition. It was advantageous to her curatorial design that the works weren't entirely produced for the show itself, but that they represent the uninterrupted consciousness of the artists at work in their respective countries.

"These eleven Turkish artists have never shown together under one concept like this, and they haven't had a group exhibition with Iranians. The same goes for the Iranians. I tried to unify the twenty-two artists. This *Immortality* show is not the last, I have another coming up, bigger than this," said Jam, who, coincidentally, had previously exhibited the concept of curating Turkish and Iranian artists together for an art fair in Genoa.

Artists are free to show their opinions, but I always tell my artists that if they want to do something about politics or religion, I'm not in. I'm interested in art itself. The works come from their culture, as when you see the elephant of Hamid Asadi's *Untitled* (2015), or the deer of Koç's *Tabula Rasa Series* (2018), a baby and mother in Kaya's *Life* (2013), Horasan's self-portrait *Untitled* (2018).

July 1, 7:59 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Dissolution

The total range of visible colors appeared, an unstained spectrum like a miracle from end to end of the social horizon, as a comradely, outgoing crowd of talkers and lookers warmed up to each other and joyfully packed into the polished, summery airs of Istanbul's nostalgic core district of Beyoğlu, basking in the reflective gleam of its brilliantly restored white marble of Levantine facades, lush and verdant with overhanging limbs, flowery dresses and patterned shirts, trendsetting statements and fashion crimes alike and all-inclusive, turning up smiles by the seasonal graces of a city peaked with the late June sun of the northern sky.

It happened on the way to a new spot named after the old *kıraathane* of Turkey's traditional street culture. The stairwell began to rise in the dim entranceway with an explanation for newcomers and millennials. As the sign read, *kıraathane* is a noun, for the furnished coffeehouse where hot, caffeinated beverages are served aplenty, and the number of available newspapers and magazines are kaleidoscopic, diverse as the region and its people in countless, multiform heaps. The word itself goes back to the nineteenth century, an Ottoman loan from the Persian and Arabic, *kıraat*, meaning a place for reading and also for Quran pronunciation lessons. Finally, *khane* is taken from the Persian for a house or building.

With that, the stylish, emerald-hued font of Kıraathane Istanbul Literature House came out with a fantastic new presence for the downtown scene. It was a sign of hope, of a changing of the guard so to speak, a cultural paradigm shift of possibility. Inside, it was manifested as two brightly lit floors filled with artwork by eighteen individuals and collaborations in a tantalizing variety of mediums.

A collective transformation Sketch artist Özgür Can Taşcı exposed the inner reaches of a psychological landscape for his work *Scene II* (2018), bursting with uninhibited human life. In the midst of crumbling, misshapen stone towers and darkened huts, a sweeping bustle of figures played in the fields of the Rabelaisian imagination. Coursing with the venous stretch of outstretched peoples of every type and size and intent, it is an ambitious visualization, set to relatively simple material and created entirely by ink pen on roughly cut paper. Sharing space with his more archaic vision is the perfectly contemporary *Untitled I* (2018), a pair of photo luster prints by Enes Ka and Cansu Yıldırım made with a clean and glossy design aesthetic, only to provoke a more challenging experience for those unsuspecting, soft eyes wandering in search of manufactured beauty in the manner of mainstream advertising.

In front of the elegant, bay window where a wild, urban growth of leafy greens poked through to cool down from the simmering air, a forty-minute, Super 35mm color film played, *Suddenly* (2018), by Gizem Bayıksel. Although powerfully timed to the cultural moment of the here and now, it mused on the preliterate past by exploring the nonverbal poetics of nature in a Polish forest. A voiceover could be heard with the looping video for those impulsive and curious enough to wear a prepared set of headphones: "You see, I keep thinking that what we need is a new language, a language of the heart..."

The artists at *SINIR/SIZ* (Turkish for *Boundary/Less*) grapple with the transitions of youth. For example, the mixed-technique artist Elif KK dialogues with her family's heritage and its overlap in the present with her series of five works on paper, made in the current year. With titles like *Nazar* (Evil Eye) and *Ergen Alevi* (Adolescent Fever), she adapts her personal experience of historic Turkish motifs into evocative and fantastical depictions of power animals and anthropomorphic figures locked in otherworldly backgrounds, illustrating the aspirational symbols of life as a young artist.

Similarly, though more emphatically in the realm of aesthetics, the Iranian technical, Rapidograph pen drawer Jaleh Nezamdoust explores her rich Persian lineage and its innate, imaginative creativity, as in the geometrical patterns of its Oriental signature, the folkloric relationships between humankind and wildlife through the lens of a kind of archaist feminism. Her work is entrancing, as deer are adorned with symbol-bearing necklaces, and stare unshaken into the eye of the beholder, where a lone woman immersed in sinuous vegetation cradles a small mammal in her arms, wrapped in translucent curtains, standing tall atop lavish tiling decorated ceremoniously with a single patch of fertile, growing soil.

"The *SINIR/SIZ* exhibition shows us that there are always opportunities for young artists to produce and show their art outside of the mainstream art scene. Young artists often find themselves stuck in competitions and galleries. *SINIR/SIZ* proves that alternative initiatives give much more space for them," said the Istanbul-based art writer Kültigin Kağan Akbulut, who attended the opening with proud admiration for his fellow creatives.

Elif KK underlines the differences between her and her mother, who has a traditional background. Elif KK also points out how she embraced her mother's customs in her drawings. Jaleh Nezamdoust depicts Iranian mythology, from her perspective as a young woman. And Nezamdoust, as a refugee living in Turkey, shows that there is no limit to making art.

Clearly representing the cusp of creative maturity, *SINIR/SIZ* shines with unapologetic youth and experimental dash. The oil painting of Nazım Ünal Yılmaz, for instance, is a welcome return to the artistic company of an elder medium, although its focus has immediate gravity. Its title is loosely translated as *The Odd One Falling from the Stairs* (2018). It has an early twentieth century throwback feel, out of a Cubist daydream, as a face peers from the nebulous wash of tints and shades coalescing against unhidden brushstrokes. With like effect, İlhan Sayın's delicate watercolor, *Aysel* (2016) is a charming portrait of an older lady of noble frame, pearled and crowned with a courtly headdress, bedecked in silver, fuchsia and lime tones matching her elegant glasses as she looks up, an ageless, intellectual queen of the faint world behind her.

The *Untitled* (2018) acrylic painting by Nisa Şenol reflected the outward style of the onlookers and contributors who kicked off the show to demonstrate the flowering of contemporary identity in a city, country, and world that increasingly seeks inner freedom from dysfunctional social norms by making and showing artwork that affirms difference, and glorifies the beauty of all

regardless of which direction they tend to pursue in life on the path to happiness, inspiration and community. It's a theme also captured by another acrylic work, equally titled, *Untitled* (2018) by Elif Tekneci, who poses a setting where a couple lounge along the branch of a spotted tree. They hang colorless, as outlines, stretched almost lifeless over the stark, black and white offshoot from the wide trunk. Below there is an abstract space of earthy brown, while above, the area is filled with a subdued blue. While cartoonish and unreal, its graphic metaphors speak of a generation held between two artificial contrasts, groundless, unsheltered, yet wholly present, alive and naturally untamed.

July 5, 6:17 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Tales

A man walking from Istanbul's downtown core descends down the sloping runoffs of post-industrial urbanization through the ramshackle, migrant neighborhood of Dolapdere, leading into cinematic darkness. Outside is bright and hot, and the streets beam with life, exhausted and exuberant alike. The indoor shade is cool and muffled, encased in a sleek building where the airs of high art surface for a breath under the digital aesthetic of gold-hued signage.

Dirimart reigns with worldly sophistication over the local culture sphere as on a tight ship circumnavigating the globe, traversing uncharted waters in search of pure visual treasure. It is found in a moving image, beginning with the familiar faces of teen angst, claiming the pubescent fantasies of an unreal world for the taking, where all that lives in opposition, biologically speaking, is to be possessed.

To establish the video procession, men, from the earliest stages of maturation, affirm the primordial, masculine aggression to dominance that has defined Western civilization since time immemorial with its urge to subdue nature, only stopping short when they are forced to look into themselves. Therein lies an altogether different set of obstacles, demanding metaphysical bravery above all. *Tales of Us* (2014) starts along such lines, with a pockmarked adolescent at the head of his schoolboy pack scheming a tale, a delusion, where countless beautiful young woman exist simply to please them, to make his puerile dreams come true.

One rational friend replies with sharp sarcasm: "Nobody likes us. Why are you messing with a fantasy?" He responds: "We know about the reality. Don't ruin a fantasy." And the film kicks off with a chilling menagerie of recycled clips, a technique that German video artist Oliver Piestch has stylized to pitch perfection over his many years exhibiting works in solo and group shows around the world, peaking with distinction when he won the 2012 Best Film Award at the Swedenborg Film Society in London for his piece, *From Here to Eternity* (2010).

*Tales of Us* can be interpreted as a series of motifs, opening with wonder, and then coming to passion, love, separation, aging, and finally, the great absence of death. As a whole, the work has the feel of old millennial nostalgia, musing on films from the '80s and '90s, like Tom Cruise's *Risky Business*, and Ben Stiller's *There's Something About Mary*, crisscrossing the awkward pranks and coquettish looks that rise with early body development and spliced with experimental flashes of courageous beauty and youthful audacity.

As a lone girl smiles at a garage wallpaper printout of David Bowie, the classic 1968 song, *One* by Harry Nilsson sounds off, echoing in recent film history with Aimee Mann's version, known best in P.T. Anderson's film, *Magnolia*, which has many aesthetic similarities to Piestch's work, in editing and ambiance.

In the midst of hysterical hype and blissful naivety, a skinny man with thinning hair stands front and center in the camera frame, and looking down reflectively, enters into a pessimistic

monologue in the middle of a sunlit park, as multicolored balloons and deep green trees wave out of focus behind him while the half-hour montage of a film continues. "People always end up the way they started out. No one ever changes," he says, with a convincing, steady tone. "Whether you're 13 or 50, you'll always be the same."

The work of Piestch comments on the essential drama of being with intensive scrutiny both on human life, with its collective plagues of insecurities, and the film industry, with its desensitizing use of repetitive provocation. The artist has chosen the language of video and film as a tool through which to tell his nonlinear, often abstract, visual narratives that dive into the subconsciousness of mass society and return with calls to probe the irrepressible and perennial questions of existence.

He does so with a refreshing, unapologetic vitality, enriching seers to overcome the sensations of shock and disgust, so that they may ultimately enjoy the reward of a world that is fragmented, but true to immediate experience, where normalcy has no ground in lived reality, where the visceral fragility and nagging mystery of day-to-day thought is dissected and analyzed to creative abandon. With patience, his rapid successions of hypnotic images offer tantalizing clues into the nature of suffering, as in the Buddhist determination, sourced in desire.

Following a particularly effective transition from percussive music to complete silence when the digitized appearance of the camera lens is smeared with cosmic fluid that rains down from the starry universe, a professorial voice thunders: "You get Lacan's point, fantasies have to be unrealistic because the moment, the second that you get what you seek, you don't, you can't want it anymore." The clips are suggestive, but still innocent in many ways, merely a meander over the gripping impulses that haunt men and women throughout their entire span of life. As the voice carries on: "In order to exist, desire must have its objects perpetually absent."

And here, Piestch undercuts the fundamental attraction to film, in which the minds and hearts of every living generation have been thoroughly steeped and basted. By mastering jump cut editing, he exposes the unseen, indifferent layers of advertising and appeal that define perception, as in the most popular medium of entertainment and information, and in a time when the globalized world is overfull with people superficially and unnaturally connected by figments and shadows of each other. It is a method akin to the literary venture pioneered by the Dadaists of the 1920s and later advanced by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, called "the cut-up technique" where eccentric geniuses perform miracles of reinterpretation by slicing and folding texts to read them anew, typically as inspiration for novel creations.

When nothing is really happening in front of the eyes of a seer, as one who stares blankly at a video screen, but through and through it looks and feels like something is happening, specifically that which is on his or her mind, the art of film realizes its essence. The celluloid form is the prime catalyst of the modern and contemporary, an alchemical medium by which the creative principles of the mind are activated, prompting the overactive imagination in the way of a pent up youth aware that they exist only while mulling and moping from classroom to classroom,

from house to house, building to building, field to field. The common theme is dire repression, and is known to all who experience life as if they were constantly on the same, alarmingly predictable path, set to a perfect circle of unoriginal return.

*Tales of Us* appreciates one of the most touching scenes in the last decade of film, drawing out its emotional sensitivity with Pietsch's signature powers of invention, where he contextualizes the subtlest facial expressions and inflections of the voice with visual references that stress truths so profound they are unsettling, as they are able to pierce the raw heart of the seer already weakened to adoration by the onslaught of finely diced cinematic excerpts. It is from a 2012 festival favorite, *The Sessions*, where Helen Hunt and John Hawkes share a beautiful moment of suspension from the emotional gravity of amorous attachment. With a face floating in euphoric contemplation, Hawkes's character, Mark, a man bedridden with an iron lung, asks her: "What happens when people become attached to each other?"

As he presses on with his existential interrogation, his voice has an otherworldly cadence, like someone drifting down from the clouds to observe human drama for an amusing afternoon, only to return to a home in the clear, open sky. Hunt, in a vulnerable role, plays a kind woman named Cheryl, who responds: "Nothing or everything. The rest is by negotiation. You can leave it at love and attraction, or you can make things complicated, like most people do."

July 8, 11:12 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Business

The exterior of Pilevneli Gallery has the sophisticated look of high architecture. Facing the constant and dusty bustle of Irmak Avenue, it has a minimal, cubist pattern of long, black, vertical grating visible between even, lightless gaps. The designer building appears unfazed by Istanbul's relentless weathering, as it withstands incessant blasts of midsummer heat.

From its skillfully conceived storefront, oblique frames lunge out into the churning smog to train the minds of passersby with a pure visual exercise of postmodern aesthetics, contrasted with the industrial power of the gargling inner-city freeway. And yet, the stylish facade is nearly undetectable, being entirely distinct from its surroundings of spires ascending to Istanbul's religious heights, as from the peculiar steeple of the neighboring Evangelistria Greek Church, and the pearly new complex of Yenişehir Mosque about a hodgepodge of construction outfits fuming along the buzzing artery.

Inside, the raw, unfinished concrete walling is smooth to the touch, alternating with patches of bare brick, drawing eyes into a fashionable revision of history. Through the entrance floor, and up stark, metal staircases, the spare emptiness of the gallery is almost bleak except for the loud ambiance of its intent: To show world-class art.

Off-white paint gleams under pale, yellow light bulbs, exposing the cracks in the plain, factory flooring. Square in the middle of the room down the sole introductory hallway is a silvery, reflective cube made of tarpaulin, lit from inside. It is a wholly impermanent structure set dead center to furnish the blank vacuum of gallery space. And the open slits at its sides beckon with a silent humor. Within the mysterious, infinite enigma, there are places in places, where worlds live and die in opposition to the encompassing vacancy outside.

The artist Bora Akıncıtürk installed the piece, *I'm So Happy Because* after a message he received from a WhatsApp group. The exhibition notes trigger emotionally potent phrases like, "peer pressure," "missing out," "privileged millennial," "brutal expectations," "disinformation and depression," "minimal conformism" and "tiny bubble." These are adequate expressions by which to assess the hurricane blend of private effects tossed about under the reflective tarp. It is a hyperreal dystopia born of the mainstream twenty-first century worldview, overgrown from what the American intellectual Cornel West called "weapons of mass distraction." A lecturer of repute who's also mostly an outspoken critic of racism, he warned of the dangerous overuse of media gadgetry, which everyone loves to hate for its global dissemination, but that on a deeper level exploits the fragile vulnerabilities of youth.

A stained, uncovered pillow is lone as an island, separated by the cold, stone ground, away from thin blankets smeared with cigarette butts and crushed pretzels as the littered refuse of the convenience store lifestyle is laid to waste. Liters of water are half drunk and contained in a white plastic bag. Broken cups and crumpled bottles are only some of the varieties of store-bought packaging and urban ruffraff. It is an aftermath bursting with all of the knickknacks of

contemporary twenty-somethings blinded by dizzying fits of needs and starts; filters and papers for rolling tobacco, the containers and wrappings of takeout food, unmaintained sports gear, molding classic books, and the whole span of domestic affairs run dry to sudden, total decay.

Akıncıtürk's work features *Extinction in Four Movements* (2018), a short video collaboration with Berk Çakmakçı. It's a satirical montage seemingly ripped from shared WhatsApp files, the stills and selfies of a generation forced to repeatedly imagine and emphasize the dominance of human omnipresence over nature and each other. At the same time, it is about a generation bullied by corporate interests disguised under popularly accepted harassments and invasions of privacy, constantly pressed to perform mediocre acts of creativity bound within the preprogrammed channels of commercialized communication.

*I'm So Happy Because* speaks of that generation, increasingly prodded with trendsetting insults to all forms of intelligence, promoting anti-intellectual humor attached to the overarching zeitgeist that is committed to benumbing, artificial saturation. Consuming culture itself without the means or wherewithal to establish truly creative reciprocity, they abuse metaphysical addictions through tools of narcissism that shamelessly brainwash them into virtual identification with an imposed collective memory.

Down below, the underground gallery floor screams of the 1980s with the stereotypical colors of its budding, electronic heyday, when pasty hues of pink, yellow, orange and blue painted the faces of post-punk concertgoers and raving fashionistas fearlessly out to have fun, as they lavished themselves with deep purple lipsticks and glamorous, glittering hairspray. Originally from Copenhagen where she studied at the Rietveld Academie, Evren Tekinoktay's art began from the techniques of collage. She later explored the form of the body in familiar, visual languages, recycling images of its parts as objects to be consumed and transformed.

Her exhibition of five, equally-sized rectangular works at Pilevneli Gallery is titled *Lotus*, after the mythical, symbolic beauty of the flower as a visualization for spiritual enlightenment, with its muddied roots shooting up through the underworld of suffering into the water and sunlight of soul clarity and holistic awareness. She delights in the twisting, tubular forms of neon glowing over cartoonish shapes akin to pop-art abstraction.

In one work, a perfect heart revolves, as in a kinetic sculpture. Its whirring quietly whispers to the room, telling her best-kept secrets behind the mechanics of artistic expression. Her pieces have a simple and delightful joy, a whimsical grace, as they appreciate an effective, three-dimensional tone with dangling, scribble lines stylized in riveting ways, reminiscent of the vibrant, brushstroke figures that Miles Davis painted late in his life.

The virtuosic intricacy of Can Sayınlı's silk and wool rugs are evident with a simple glance. Its first impressions are liable to make everlasting, mental imprints. His pieces are entrancing, tapestry-like, and irreverent considering the subject thematics. He weaves everything from an amanita mushroom to a portrait of the eccentric Muzaffer Sarısülük, to the full moon and back



over powerful abstractions. His neo-traditional motifs recall visionary tribal signatures woven into the fabric of life by peoples like the Zuni of the American southwest, or the Shipibo of the Amazon, spanning the gamut of indigenous and ancient means to recording time and life by the multigenerational repetition of collective signatures as visual ideas.

Sayınlı exemplifies contemporary archaism with peerless grab. It's a creative stream often pursued particularly by Turkish artists in search of the roots of culture through the techniques and practices of novel creativity on the cusp of the present moment and its vital pulse in society. That conceptual dissonance is appreciated by the likes of sculptor Kemal Tufan, for example, whose monumental stone carvings are scattered throughout the globe to advance his special take on prehistoric, or trans-historical consciousness with an artistic process that is equal parts fresh, fleeting and timeless. In her own way, Günnur Ozsoy also went down this path with her felt-covered, contemporary sculptures inspired by Yörük nomad tents and whirling dervish caps.

In 2003, while studying in graphic design at the Central Saint Martins College in London, Sayınlı collaborated with the Norwegian rug artist Jorgen Evil Ekvoll. The duo exhibited works together at Galerist in Istanbul, in 2007 and 2011. After pursuing knowledge of the traditional craft of *kilim* (traditional light carpet) weaving by conducting extensive, serious research, Sayınlı embarked on another creative partnership, this time handing down the gifts of his muse to the London-based artist Charlie Swan, known for working primarily with pencil shavings. Pilevneli's exhibition, *Rugs and Kilim* featured handwoven *kilims* that Swan and Sayınlı made collaboratively after sharing mutual perspectives on Istanbul, where they've both lived for years.

In many ways, Sayınlı's contemporary revision of traditional craft is similar to the works of Ai Wei Wei, especially as in the comprehensive exhibition of his life's work displayed at the Sakıp Sabancı Mardin City Museum. As when Wei Wei lacquers the plight of Syrian refugees onto a ceramic dish, so Sayınlı weaves cosmic consciousness and unhinged worldly liberalism into a revitalization of the age-old art of textiles.

July 12, 10:23 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Artifice

It is only after partaking in healthy doses of irony and suspicion when the intended meaning behind certain conceptual art becomes clear. Once overarching motifs and inner metaphysical designs are grasped, the art itself is to be redeemed for mental keys, so as to unlock a transformative process, one suggesting an act of fresh, creative thinking. In passing, understanding such work would seem too much of a stretch, not only for the intellect itself, but also for its emotional aspect, testing the limits of intellectual pride.

With only a momentary, footsore glance, the artworks would not likely be respected as art, but instead just another trivial experience by normal everyday assumptions, especially to those who might feel that they are missing out on some obscure inside joke. Such members of the general public, aptly termed uninitiated moderns, are liable to receive the uncomfortable sensation that they are being deceived of greatly-valued time, and that what they have come to see is in fact, nothing short of painfully ridiculous.

It is not without a sense of humor that Nazlı Pektaş curated *İntihal Mi? Hal Mi? (Appropriation? Case?)* for the posh and gleaming, ultramodern institution on İstiklal Avenue known, by the literal translation of its name, Yapı Kredi Culture Art, a new outcropping of the publishing house that is synonymous with literary refinement, as its insignia is nearly ubiquitous on neat bookshelves inside every well-bred Turkish home.

If the seemingly thoughtless name of the establishment is any indication, the art held inside its exquisitely furnished three gallery floors might be entirely unoriginal, or worse, conventionally corporate. Instead, the movers and shakers of Istanbul's potent art scene, Pektaş among them, have risen to the challenge of aesthetic dignity and world-class poise with intelligent tongue-in-cheek intrigue for the mixed exhibition, ending with a pair of photography shows that fertilize the visionary field where history is preserved and made.

The very definition of art has been mined for all that it is worth, and has, in turn, transcended value to the point where the absolutely arbitrary foundation of currency is revealed as equally blameworthy of its existence by popular demand. In the same way as money itself is one of the greatest objects of human desire, so art, particularly the conceptual, has a lasting place in contemporary society.

Concept-driven art has aligned conveniently, whether purposefully or not, to the essential abstraction that happens to be one of the chief and fundamental principles of historic civilization, arguably the most important in today's capitalist zeitgeist. Just as money only retains value when it represents real material wealth, so the central story of modern art remains relevant in its struggle to identify human creativity as truly subjective, personal, individual, and by that meaning original, independent and free.

In traditional European thought going back to the ancients, the idea of art was always posed against its progenitor, that being nature, the ultimate source, where the muses were born and fly back to on a whim. Postmoderns, as contemporaries, still reflect deeply on the line where art and nature meet in the soul of the artist. Going one step further, so as to gain much needed perspective, Pektaş curated a vision of art as sourced in itself.

Her intuition is based on the haunting, lingering notion that art, in fact, has consistently found inspiration within the spiraling world of its own peculiar, internalized makings. To state her concept in the open air, she has proven a few points in the meantime under the upscale, highbrow gaze of Yapı Kredi's gallery space. *Appropriation? Case?* is a revolving dialogue between the seven artists whose works fall into one another's histories, mutually emerging anew with persistent questions about how to define originality, how to contrive the contemporary from the sneaking inevitability of sheer absorption in the past and its omnipresent repercussions.

There is an industrial monstrosity on the third floor at Yapı Kredi Culture Art, some kind of oversized vise out of the gothic imagination of Hieronymus Bosch at the apocalyptic end of the medieval world as it met with the power-hungry factory inventions that set the inhuman pace of modern life. It is an installation titled, *After Surprise Witness* (2018) by Ferhat Özgür, simply listed as mixed media. The bearings and fixtures of the thing are mammoth, deeply in contrast to the subtleties of the finer works around it, as from the pen work from which it took shape in the mind of its original artist.

Özgür gleaned the concept for his utterly material piece from Erinç Seymen's surrealistic ink drawing on paper, *Surprise Witness I* (2011), which is curated in video form, seen with a gliding zoom over the psychological landscape of fantastic arboreal and fungal specimens, with a couple of drifters loafing contemplative in its wild, otherworldly backdrop. They seem to not care a jot for the boldly contradictory, mechanical press machine dropped as from a space station onto the strange, hyper-organic realm.

Erinç Seymen makes his next appearance at *Appropriation? Case?* with his more recent ink pen drawing on paper, *Dikefalos* (2018). With stunning documentary realism, Seyman materialized the twin helmets of a nineteen-year-old, seventeenth century Danish prince, embossed with elaborate floral imprints. Beneath these symbols of masculinity lies the Oxford shoe style of a metropolitan dandy mirroring the work. They are the very wearable and handmade, size-forty flower shoes of Mehtap Baydu. His piece, *Shoes* (2015) belongs at a fashion shoot. They are propped up and backlit for the sweet amusement of gawkers in for a bout of visual rivalry between the feudalist and the flaneur.

And then, in a curatorial cycle that only Pektaş could fathom with her mediation on the artistic genealogy of innovation, the work of Özgür appears again, this time with the absurdist video, *Heal me!* (2007), the inspiration for the work of Baydu, for her video, *Preparing for the Day* (2018). In his piece, *Heal me!*, an elderly woman in pajamas looks out of her apartment building

window to the street below, but she does not lower a bucket on a string to get groceries from the corner store as is common in many neighborhoods throughout Istanbul.

Özgür's camera cuts to her chained in a wacky series of events that begins with a man on a round metal dish in her kitchen unlocking her from bondage. She next proceeds to a bedroom where she blindfolds herself and awaits the young sir, who flattens himself out over two beds so that she can trace a clothes iron over his back. Similarly, in her *Preparing for the Day*, Baydu irons a mock-up of herself in the form of a collage of composite photographs. Robed for the morning, she flattens out the wrinkles of her papery likening, nonchalant in her figurative mood.

Pektaş curated *Appropriation? Case?* like a waltz, in three-time. The first three beats fall on the works of Özgür, Baydu and Seymen before shifting registers into a different aesthetic trio with artists Çağrı Saray, Özlem Günyol & Mustafa Kunt, and Necla Rüzgar.

Çağrı Saray explored the reaches of public perception with his profoundly meticulous drawing on paper, *Spaces of Memory: Haydarpaşa Train Station* (2016). Interestingly, the work by Necla Rüzgar, her video, *Fibrillation* (2018) showcases a related visual effect, tearing at the seams of sight and sense with an experiment in unfocused self-awareness, as the subject of her vision melds between woman and dog, both asleep in a state of fluid consciousness. It is an image unresolved and shaken by the vibrating, interdependent mystery of being that characterizes the imaginative spirit throughout *Appropriation? Case?*

July 16, 9:59 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Ancients

Inside the bewildering cornucopia of long-lost finds at Istanbul's thoroughly glorious and enlightening Archaeology Museum, forty photographs by Mimmo Jodice are curated under a half-replicated Persian temple, built in the classical style with Greco-Roman influence that likely came with the Anatolian conquests of the sixth century B.C., when the Achaemenid Empire had crushed all of Asia Minor in its fleeting grasp.

The contemporary exhibition of Jodice's photographs was gleaned from the prestigious Cotroneo Collection, approximating a total of two hundred and twenty of his pieces, including the "Mediterraneo" series in its entirety. Longtime family friends and admirers of the artist, they first met at his 1990 show at Saint Elmo Castle in Naples, *The Invisible City*. It was the start of a decade consummating a revolution in Jodice's creative process, as he dove into black and white landscapes and art photography, developing wholly original techniques that rendered his native perspective all the more authentic before the everlasting sea where so much of his Italian, Neapolitan identity was sourced. And from there, he flew around its double edges.

He had begun his artistic rediscovery of the Mediterranean in 1985 after shifting from documentary faithfulness to his subjects as the man with the camera, to becoming more subjective himself, transformed into an artist, a visionary, and a metaphysician. His old baroque tarantella touristic hometown of Naples was fertile ground to inspire his originality, as he defied its worn-out, pizza piazza exploitation. In the 1960s, he had brushed up against heroes of the avant-garde, Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, Gino De Dominicis, Joseph Kosuth, Sol Lewitt, Jannis Kounellis, Hermann Nitsch to name a few. He later befriended many of them, notably Warhol.

A selection from "Mediterraneo" is displayed at the end of a series of halls on the first floor, introduced by a labyrinthine tunnel extending to the outdoor entrance by a narrow passageway of white canvas, another example of the unending, sprawl of renovation efforts to preserve the immortal cosmopolis that welcomes time explorers from every walk of life across the encircling, winged globe to transcend space by appreciating the past with fresh, unwavering eyes.

From outside, ambling for a midsummer wander amid the enchanting complex of Ottoman-era museums and a shaded garden of Byzantine ruins, the building with the Jodice show is unmarked as such, almost inconspicuously situated across from two dusty but spectacular institutions, one dedicated to the Ancient Orient, with its impressive scope of pagan cultural achievements from Egypt, Arabia, Persia, and Mesopotamia, and the other the Tiled Kiosk, housing the city's Museum of Islamic Art.

The ambiance of the understated, though monumental plaza between Gülhane Park and Topkapı Palace has an artful, esoteric resonance, imaginably sheltering a collective muse who asks for a price. It is not the admission fee, but more like an offering in the spirit of a ceremonial worship rite from antiquity, when to give an object symbolically was to await grace under the hypnotic spell of the land's memory, as a seeker at the gate of oracular tradition pining for an unearthly

voice to issue divine wisdom in the starlit dark, surrounded by a roofless colonnade deep and high in the remote wilderness.

There are hearts that beat today who feel the enduring press of mystery from worlds beyond the veil of modernity. It would be too simplistic to heap them together as postmodernist. Instead, they are a rare breed whose lifeblood comes alive with a vital pulse only when reaching for the aesthetic ideal that is more like the peculiar sensation of total harmony through right perception of nowness, the moment in real time, what Zen sages call "ordinary mind," uniting the trinity of past, present and future into a holistic consciousness of being.

Jodice achieves a union of ancient and contemporary through his photographic light, developing the figment of time itself into a fixed image of human creation by visioning the anthropomorphic character of the Mediterranean. In his masterful lens, the region's landscapes and the enduring arts and ideas that it has cultivated over the ages, and continues to nurture, surface from the darkroom of modernism with undying life and personality, what the ancients might convoke in deference to a god.

The curation of "Mediterraneo" at the Archaeology Museum conveys a powerful design, opening with a Neapolitan seascape tinged with the soft radiance that is characteristic of Jodice, a muted white gold, a platinum blonde darkened by a nocturnal complexion, yet cloudless and unobscured as a sheen of metallic promise. Aside it are his pictures of the crop of ancient statues that have grown from the land like its roots, only preserved as perfectly alive as the subjects that once inspired them. He conveys the immortal essence of the creative mentality that thrived in the classical world, survived by figurative sculptures that he lights with his practically cinematic, though wholly idiosyncratic effects to pronounce dramatic, human expression.

Filmmakers employ a certain visual technique by moving the camera forward while zooming back, or vice versa, that Jodice instills with genius potency, subtly, as in his single 1990-1995 photograph of a bronze sculpture from the National Archaeology Museum in Naples, and more emphatically in such works as that of the Temple of Serapis in Bergama, in Turkey's İzmir province, famed for its antique architectural bounty. Jodice shoots bronze with a singular knack for paranormal luminosity, metamorphosing apparently lifeless sculptures into effulgent souls that weep and glow with human emotion.

If it's an empty space, Jodice will catalyze its slightest sliver of light into an angelic yawn of the vast, immeasurable firmament. And he does not merely gravitate to obscure places on which to shine his infinite light of ancient religious persuasion. His pieces draw from popular destinations like Petra in Jordan and even the Greek section at the British Museum, but he converts ready-made public presentations into matchless examples of his lifelong pursuit as an artist devoted exclusively to the medium of film.

The process that crystallized with the 1995 publication of *Mediterraneo* by the distinguished, New York-based *Aperture* photo book publisher rose out of Jodice's upbringing as a child of

interwar Naples, toughening his resolve to make himself new and relevant out of the ash and rubble, to retrace the footsteps of his cultural origins.

From that dim shore, he started to carve his stamp, ultimately prompting his peers and critics to see aspects and hints of his beloved birthplace in all of his works. "Mediterraneo" in that way linked Naples to the greater spiritual ecology from which it emerged to gain a namesake and heritage all its own.

Although renowned as an autodidact who became proficient as a sculptor, painter, set designer and actor, he did not learn photography until well into his twenties. That was the late 1950s, and thinking in logistical terms, toward the advancement of his career in the arts, he merged his aptitude for individual expressiveness in his work with the craft of photojournalism. His highly emotive pictures soon landed him the Guggenheim Museum, with the *Italian metamorphosis 1943-1968* group exhibition. It immediately catapulted his name into the pantheon of contemporary artists, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns among them.

A year before "Mediterraneo" was published, he ended a twenty-four-year post at the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples, where he taught and mentored Italian students in photography as new media and as a mode of personalized, in that way universal, artistry. When he was interviewed by *Vogue Italy* in 2010, he said that even though he was in his seventies, he still had many things to say using his traditional techniques. The absorptive quality of his photographs have the immediate capacity to merge subject and object, creature and creation, humanity and nature, past and future, into the unity of opposites through heightened perceptions of time.

July 20, 1:53 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Past

A lone man looks up, swallowed by an unseen sky. He is physically desperate to the point of soul exhaustion, clothed in rags and perched on a steep slope, barely holding onto the loose rocks of a remote, volcanic mountain, high above the tree line, well beyond sight of civilization, society, and culture. His eyes are covered in the bulky, virtual reality goggles of the fast oncoming, though seemingly distant and increasingly unnatural future.

Scantly clad, he is a man out of time, forsaken by nature and history, simply gone. As he gazes into absolute nothingness, his screaming penetrates through the wilderness with an echoing intensity, as to reverberate through eternity.

It is the striking, central image of the *Untitled* (2018) video work by the young Hasan Mert Öz, a graduate of Marmara University's painting department. His work is curated for display by Nadim Samman along Istanbul's core commercial, pedestrian thoroughfare of İstiklal Avenue as part of the Akbank 36th Contemporary Artists Prize Exhibition.

And on down the way that has symbolized freedom and modernity for at least the last century untold, Yapı Kredi Publishing's cutting-edge "Culture Art" building is a contemporary architectural diamond in the rough within the city's formidable renovation efforts.

Across from the oldest high school in Turkey, established in 1481 as Galatasaray University, the multi-story, transparent glass facade of the restored building is a beacon for the ongoing intellectual legacy of the metropolitan region that began with a meeting between a sultan and a wise man, namely Beyazıt II and the Rose Father (Gül Baba), who asked that the made emperor of conquered New Rome prepare his imperial foundations as a center for multicultural cultivation.

When the Ottoman Empire fell, the Balkan nations that had been under its sway for five centuries set out to make themselves anew during what is now known as the interwar era. In order to do so, they employed the most current, even fashionable, technologies of the day. Among these was the camera, a mint device for capturing the immediacy of the social moment. The scholar Natasa Miskovic led the project, and authored the texts that culminated in the historical photograph exhibition, *Cities on the Move: Post-Ottoman*. Its exploration traverses four cities in five themes. Istanbul, Ankara, Sarajevo and Belgrade are pictured in the contexts of the city center, the nation and the body, leisure and religion, dress, and the bazaar.

The quality of the photographs is utterly impressive, standing the test of time, but they were not taken by mere amateurs. The photographs curated for the show were gleaned from leading newspapers, specifically by a few top cameramen of note.

They are the all-but-forgotten Namık Görgüç and Selahattin Giz, working for *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, and Aleksandar Simic and Raka Ruben, shooting for the Yugoslav paper, *Politika*,



and Svetozar Grdijan for another called *Vreme*, and last, though only least in age, the nineteen-year-old Alija Aksamija is also framed among the sharp restorations.

Eye-popping with surprise detail and vivid urgency, the portrayals of the four cities in focus are scattered, so as to purposefully lead the seer to envisage the bygone settings themselves. Ladies donning a sideways boater and a backwards toque walk in vogue, gloved, arm-in-arm, with a leashed dog in tow.

The charm and personality of these women transcend a century of national turbulence, evoking the naivety of an emerging feminism that flourished with a smile as the leisurely duo out on the make in the shadow of an iconic, embattled Atatürk statue. In a related scene, a team of women take to the unpaved street in military vestiges, holding Turkish flags and marching together with comrades.

The movement to modernize is synonymous with female empowerment. It is nowhere more visible than in primary documentation, such as photographs, that depict women experimenting and at the same time assessing the front line of civilization's technical and cultural advances. Throughout the exhibition, *Cities on the Move: Post-Ottoman* the feminist gaze and its enduring presence makes a stand, as in the pilot's seat of a plane, in the uniform of an official, or as the more numerous membership of a folkloric band singing Slavic ballads to the homeland in full, traditional regalia. The stills are accompanied by a twenty-seven-minute film adaptation, titled *Zeitgeist* by director Lordan Zafranovic, written by Miskovic and set to entrancing music by the Bosnian vocalist Bozo Vrecco.

Only ghosts walk on the other side of the machine that recreates the past. In through the virtual art of Mat Collishaw, some two hundred people daily cross the *Thresholds*, as his exhibition is titled at Yapı Kredi Culture Art, into the high society English institutions of 1839. During the months of January and August that year, a failed sketch artist named William Henry Fox Talbot presented ninety-three photogenic drawings. In broad view of the public, photography was born.

Talbot, a modest creative, did not lay claim to perfection, only to a beginning that could revolutionize perception. He then confessed not understanding the limits to the process that he had flung into life. And truly, he had foresight. It is the case that countless people see through an artificial lens before, and long after, the sight is beheld organically, in the fleeting moment.

*Thresholds*, while not a total initiation of unprecedented technology, deepens public awareness and interaction with matters of subjectivity that touch on the very nature of being. Blinded by VR goggles, the curious see an immersive world that moves and crawls with light and heat, information and history.

An unreal fire is unnervingly hot to the touch. Spine-chilling mice dart across the gas lit, nineteenth century floorboards of The Model Room inside the gothic, cathedral-like interior of

the King Edward's School, where the British Association for the Advancement of Science showed the first photographs to the world. Outside, there were riots.

Collishaw resurrects them, as the Chartists beyond the fray sound off enraged through the nearest window in earshot of many more prototype photographs than are viewable within the five minutes given to peruse the private, early Victorian simulacrum.

Writing for the *Financial Times*, the art critic Gareth Harris presaged the virtual reality motion picture on the horizon of altered perception, by techniques that merge sensual neurology with computer engineering through a fusion of contemporary art and new media.

For the critically-minded, such experiences of augmented reality are tantamount to ordinary escapism, catapulting the unsuspecting and easily-distracted global masses further into a mechanical world devoid of life, widening the divide between middle class consumerism and the sources of environmental nourishment that are increasingly forgotten, neglected and wasted in the post-industrial paradigm.

As in the dystopian vision of the twenty-year-old Öz from Mersin, the guises of technical connectivity and scientific progress have too often led to personal isolation, collective annihilation, physical exhaustion, and a generation deprived of a feeling for its planetary roots.

July 23, 2:20 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Chisel

Two children are caught in a storm. They float over a faded copper, cement-like ground tinged with light, skin-tone purple. The colors at the heart of the fluid topography bleed around its soft, imperfect edges into a blue-green marine ambiance reflecting a metallic upper atmosphere of turquoise illuminated only very subtly at its off-center peak. They appear to be a boy and girl, locked in a gentle, sibling's embrace.

The boy wears a dirtied white shirt and high red shorts that expose his legs as equal to the shade of the backdrop that he is seemingly flung from and onto, twisted and stretching his limbs with legs pointing back ninety degrees at the kneecap. His thin black hair is lightly cast over his characterless face, pockmarked with yellows, reds and greens. The girl is of the same complexion, also nondescript, clothed in a stained long white dress over her deep purple socks. She brushes her hair with a simple comb, while the boy raises a yellow paper windmill toy above his head.

A strange breed of stiffly mechanical fish have washed up ashore into the field where the children sprawl, but with a second glance, the figments double as the nightmarish shapes of aerial bombs, at first innocent within the impressionistic surreality of the painting, only to reveal a most sinister underlying motif. Its delicate contrast is painted with powerful humanity by the Iraqi artist, Wadhah Mahdi, whose work is displayed in the countrified storefront window on Bostan Street, the avenue of gardens and open-air markets in Istanbul's beloved Bosphorus village neighborhood of Kuzguncuk.

The seasoned Syrian gallerist Adnan Alahmad reclines at his busily ringing and richly cluttered desk inside the relatively remote Kelimat Gallery, sheltered from the heavy late July rains typical of the Eurasian megalopolis, besieged by bodies of water on all sides, from the Black Sea to the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus to the Sea of Marmara. He is warmed by the presence of his family and the art of his many talented and distinguished friends, who he has known closely and often dearly in his long years collecting, exhibiting and dealing, reminiscing frequently on his heydays when he was based in Aleppo.

Inspired by a lifelong pursuit to spark creative dialogue and cultural exchange between Europe, and especially Turkey, with the Arab world, Alahmad is generously vocal in his mission, as he now prepares to show his current series of Iraqi artists throughout the country from Ankara to Izmir and beyond, setting his sights on Madrid, among other plans and schemes. Interestingly, the Iraqi artists now under his curation, titled *Azamil*, after the Arabic word for "chisel," include many names that are certainly not strange to international travel. For example, Qasim Sabti graced Kelimat Gallery with a single mixed media work utilizing textual elements exclusively for the July opening before sending his piece to Tokyo for another show.

Sabti is particularly distinguished, as Alahmad confirms, being the very first contemporary gallerist in Iraq when he founded Hewan Art Gallery in 1991, and also as head of the Plastic

Artists Society in Baghdad, to which Mahdi belongs, along with a number of Azamil artists. Among them is the fellow Baghdadi painter, Hasan Ibrahim whose layered abstraction is striking in its play on spectral geometry, intricately unfolding towards a core exercise in vibrantly technical coloration. Aesthetic semblances from his peculiar streak of nonrepresentational stylization are found in the majority of paintings at the Azamil show.

The painting professor Hussam Al-Muhssen delivered a surprise to Alahmad, as his oil on canvas at Kelimat Gallery is altogether different from that shown in the exhibition catalog. Instead of a lush, lathered concoction of spilled and waving strokes of forms, he delights in a more balanced array of collagist, rectangular foundations, heaped in fantastic disarray, nonlinear and frenetic with dissonant pigmentations. And yet, his approach has a childlike humor, likely an influence from his work at the Children's Culture House in Baghdad where he studied and worked to exhibit his artworks throughout Iraq and Europe, participating in such dignified affairs as the Institute of the Arab World and UNESCO's exhibitions of contemporary Iraqi art in Paris in 2007 and Beirut in 2010, respectively.

A year later, the Azamil painter Murad Ibrahim entered work at the UNESCO Hall in Beirut for its consecutive Iraqi artists' exhibition. His piece as shown on the wall at Kelimat Gallery begs a strong and enduring spotlight as its emergence from pure impressionistic, non-pictorial techniques into a street scene of unsuspecting beauty triggers a uniquely absorbing, harmonious visual experience, though not without a mild touch of poignancy. A trio of ladies walks across a street that is almost entirely obscured by downpour of thickly daubed palettes, forming a cinematic cityscape.

It has the air of a time imaginably wrought of the nostalgia for life in Iraq before the devastation of the ongoing war and its blinding traumas, when, with rose-tinted glasses, its people and cities had the enviable, uncomplicated quality of normalcy, one rife with Iraq's special brand of Middle Eastern elegance, of a refined order of culture that struggles to exist through its art, before the sense of daily hope in a brighter future was dashed by the apocalyptic, incessant drive to carve disaster into the stone that once held the foundation of a proud and truly global heritage.

When archaeologists discovered a Bronze Age city in Iraq late in 2016, they knew they were working in a country with a history of metal sculpture uninterrupted since the third millennium B.C.'s flourishing of the Akkadians, who built what is considered the first world empire in human history. In the footsteps of Babylon and Nineveh, contemporary Iraqi artists live and create on the giant shoulders of a megalithic past. And yet undaunted, only fired by the undying passions that provoked legendary antecedents, craftsmen specializing in bronze, such as Samira Habeeb and Atika Abdulsatar Alkhazraji continue to sculpt new bronze statues under the influence of the eternal soul incarnate in the land.

Untold secrets of world history are locked beneath the sunburnt, mystifying sands of Iraq, waylaid by human conflict and the unearthly silence that once stirred the ancients to develop the creative techniques and mediums of expression that remain valid for novel artworks today.

Habeeb made her piece within the year, and although dated 2018, it has a timeless, cyclical resonance, foreseeably itemized among precious Akkadian finds. Only her vision is profoundly contemporary for its conceptual design, its feminine poise, conceivably abstracted from the forms of a woman, a fish and the moon, its sumptuous curves evoke the female beauty and universal wisdom in nature's recurrent symbols.

With like-minded expansiveness, creating well beyond the confinements of modern time and the artifices of national borders, the bronze sculpture *Bird of Saturn* (2018) by Alkhazraji is a testament to the stellar divinations of her terrestrial legacy in relationship to the higher elements, and by that meaning, to wider planes of reality. The hooked twig of an arboreal limb shoots up like a branch lunged out of its trunk, rising as a two-pronged stand of legs for a creature entangled in chains. The thin, headless avian body strains upward and from the neck, again transformed out of its organic evolution, reaching with a wisp of frozen smoke to a ringed celestial body, Saturn.

Almost all of the works at Azamil, organized by Alahmad of Kelimat Gallery, were made within the year of their exhibition, including the two ceramics by Saad Talib Al Ani, who then worked at a fine arts institute for girls, and Akram Naji Shakir, a self-described full-time artist who has participated in most of Iraq's national art programs. Shakir's piece at Azamil is titled, *Woman* (2018), standing aside thematically empowered women relatives, the bronze sculptures *Woman in the Heart* (2018) by Naser al-Samarae and *Woman* (2018) by Fadhil Witwit.

July 26, 9:21 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Byzantine

In the late nineteenth century, Italian society had not gained perspective enough to appreciate the breadth of its history. The creative work that had moved its cultural legacies from antiquity to the contemporary was untaught, invisible.

As was typical in the wake of the eighteenth century's secular spirit of national revolution, while the inspirations of the post-Napoleonic Romantics galvanized Europe during the Age of Enlightenment, the ideological bridge that most crossed armed to the teeth with French philosophy and English technology, progressing from classical civilization to democratic modernism, swept over a pitch-black chasm of silence that none dared look down, for it was morally dark and had been riven deep with the untold sufferings of medieval times.

The entire range of artistic production cultivated during the shadowy and obscure Byzantine era following the downfall of Rome in 476 A.D. had no place in the academies of Italy, which remain some of the very oldest in the world, founded during the very era in question when Greek replaced Latin for the breathing of the sacred vowel, as the language of prayer. The esoteric backstories of Byzantine art in Italy have since surfaced to enjoy the prestige of academic discovery, as attested by one of its foremost living adherents, Professor Antonio Iacobini of Rome's Sapienza University, the twelfth institution of its kind ever to open when it first enrolled students in 1303. As he said in an interview for the Borak Films production accompanying the ANAMED exhibition, *Picturing a Lost Empire*, nineteenth century Italian scholars covered the entire early medieval, pre-Renaissance period with a single, broad stroke, heaping its multifaceted subjects under one umbrella discipline called Byzantine studies.

It was not long after the turn-of-the-century, in 1901, under the pioneering intellect Professor Adolf Venturi, when Byzantine monuments entered the realm of scientific inquiry as part of Italy's national, artistic heritage. Venturi held the first chair of art history in Italy, and his brightest student, Antonio Munoz parted from his flock when he traveled the eastern Mediterranean, reaching Turkey to study the Chora Church from 1905-1906.

None of Venturi's students had breached the dusty tomes of illustrated histories and what samples could be found drawn and arrayed for armchair curiosity not far from the school's dormitory. But for Munoz, who would earn distinction as the first Byzantine art historian from Italy, he had to see the then-unknown mosaics firsthand, examine holdings in Istanbul's archaeology museum, and scan the illuminated manuscripts of Topkapı Palace, smelling the stained parchment with a nose for resurrecting the timeless soul of the past, ultimately conveying his invaluable finds for the inaugural exhibition of Byzantine art in Italy that he co-organized at the Greek monastery of Grottoferrata in 1905.

The rise of fascism in Italy led to the prompt decline of any popular, or institutional respect for the Byzantine era, as its skewed ideals prioritized the glories of the Roman empire over the decadence that bred Greek Orthodox Christianity and its remote, introspective, eastern gaze.

There were some who went against the grain, such as Pietro Toesca of the University of Rome and most notably, Sergio Bettini, who as Iacobini explained on film beside his close colleague, Professor Alessandra Guiglia, had maintained working relationships with the latest advances in international scholarship, despite the political regressions that would have strong-armed Italy out of its intellectual birthright, and rightful place in the world's cultural heritage. Bettini especially cast a dedicated light on the exquisitely masterful sixteenth century painter Jacopo Bassano, who he loved for what he saw as the "fading shapes" of the Byzantine aesthetic in his works.

Ultimately, it was Bettini who trail-blazed the resurgence of Byzantine art studies in Italy, and not only from his professor's seat at the University of Padua, but after arduous trips through the Balkans from 1933-1936, during which time he settled temporarily in Scutari, Albania, concentrating on the country's architecture, sculpture and painting.

Finally, he reached Istanbul in 1936, schlepping through post-Ottoman Bulgaria, where, like Munoz, he made firsthand contact with artifacts in the ancient capital of Byzantium, and next experienced a transformed consciousness that moved him to emphasize the necessity of field research. It was a mentality that transferred over to the storied figure of Geza de Francovich, a legendary Italian art historian whose lectures on the Hagia Sophia remain influential, as he was thoroughly steeped in his uniquely immersive exposure to everything from the church mosaics of Thessaloniki, to fifteenth century Florentine wooden sculpture and even the far-flung Achaemenid art of old Persia.

De Francovich plays a lead role in *Picturing a Lost Empire*, essentially Italy's erudite love letter to Anatolia through its appreciation of shared Byzantine cultural foundations. For example, Giuseppe Bovini, a confrere Byzantinist in Bologna, was responsible for a momentous conference in Ravenna that welcomed Turkish specialists Nezhir Firatlı and Semavi Eyice, strengthening pan-Mediterranean relationships from the Strait of Otranto, the Bosphorus of Italy to the Tigris River that had not been pronounced for over five centuries.

Back on campus at Sapienza, de Francovich gained certain local celebrity status for luring his fellow bookworms out of the library and into the vast expanses of southeastern Turkey and the highlands of Armenia from 1966 to 1972, golden years that presaged the arrival of a matchless peer whose name stands as the pinnacle of enthusiasm on the subject, the ageless and colorful adventuress Fernanda de'Maffei, whose pictures from expeditions in the 1980s enliven the mysterious, underground air beneath the Merkez Han building on İstiklal Avenue, where ANAMED is based. She is usually seen not far from her colleague Italo Furlan, as they sketched and demystified the Mesopotamian regions of Turkey, as in the tempestuous multiethnic, Syriac region of Tur Abdin.

Natural friends, de'Maffei and Furlan espied such finds as from the sixth century Justinian fortifications of Dara, spending hot days haggling over research funds, playing cards when not observing the remains of the border that divided the Byzantine and Persian empires, and generally charting the ruins of ten centuries, from 400 to 1400. They sparked unprecedented

momentum to return the great gifts of Italy's darkest history back to her in the form of books, notes, and over 35,000 photographs at the Center for the Documentation of Byzantine Art History at Sapienza University. De'Maffei lives in the memories of her admiring students, many now senior researchers. One apprentice, Professor Grazia Marina Falla, recounts with unfading fondness of the time when she accompanied de'Maffei to Lycia in 1975.

"When it came to climb a cliff, she was always the first to reach the top," said Falla, speaking of de'Maffei as an "authentic mountain woman." Professor Guiglia confirmed as much with a strained, thinking-person's laugh, awing at how de'Maffei stopped at nothing to unlock ancient church doors in the middle of nowhere, immediately turning to local help at the nearest village when needed with a poise that she had gained as a frequent traveler in the Middle East. It was on those requisite exploratory ventures where she groomed the contemporary generation of Byzantists, such scholars as Mario D'Onofrio, expert on the ancient Armenian city of Dvin, and his traveling companion, Francisco Gondolfo, whose sole purpose was to understand and appreciate the humbling wonders of single-nave basilicas.

In one of the more recent publications of Byzantine art history research from Sapienza, titled, *The Gates of Paradise: Byzantine Art and Technology Between Italy and the Mediterranean* (2009), the author, Professor Iacobini shone a light on the art of bronze doors from eleventh to twelfth century Istanbul, which were enviably imported in Italy, and even branded as in modern terms, with signature, "made in Constantinople" quality. One door bears an iconostasis-like design and is revered as a masterpiece where it stands at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls of Rome.

August 3, 10:39 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Silver

A scrolling text moves upward against a backdrop of the starry black universe at Istanbul's Leica Gallery, but it does not foretell of cinematic dramas on Tatooine, it abbreviates the sweeping biography of a young Swiss photographer named Werner Bischof, one of the twentieth century's most important visual journalists and documentary artists, a globally-minded and altruistic seer in the tradition of the great mountain sages from the Alps to the Andes, where on May 16, 1954, he tragically saw his untimely end in a road accident. It likely happened along the impossibly steep inclines charted by whatever excuses for a road the remote Latin American landscape could offer the world's hardest travelers, among them a European cultural ambassador with a camera and the eye of a true prodigy on his way to making history.

Fortunately for the living, and for as long as photography will be appreciated, he did not meet his mortal end without giving back a few silver slices of beauty from those mythical terrains that bore the Incan civilizations, the first to cultivate the all-nourishing potato from the dewy frost of the highlands where people are genetically fit for the thinner air. They don wide-brimmed hats and scuttle atop the sharp, green ridges with supernatural poise, lounging under the shade of slow-moving clouds before returning to subsistence work in the soil that grows traditional medicine like weeds, raised by spirits like Pachamama, goddess of Earth, life, fertility and crops to the Andean peoples whose Quechua language is still heard on the windy passes.

It was in that high, sacred area, where in 1954, the year of his last breath on the road to Cuzco, in the Valle Sagrado of the Urubamba river, Bischof captured the moment of a Peruvian boy playing his pan flute, now framed and printed at 73x73 cm as one of the first of nineteen of his stunning black and white photographs at Leica Gallery.

In the book published by Fotoğrafevi in honor of Werner Bischof, sold at Leica's store in Bomontiada, the preface is written by none other than Turkey's own master cameraman Ara Güler, who expresses nostalgia and sympathy, remembering his own assignment to the Andes from which he returned, while his dear colleague did not: "When I hear the name Werner Bischof, I see high mountains, sinking clouds behind and a shining sun. I think of how my friend wandered those mountainsides of Peru." Of his photography specifically, Güler wrote, "Wind blows within them. Bringing you a smell of a town... He reminds us where we are and what we are doing."

The title of the exhibition at Leica Gallery is *Werner Bischof: 1936-1954*, with 1936 being the date that he graduated from a newly established photography class in Zurich, taught by the eminent Hans Finsler, who is posthumously idolized at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, for assuming a principal position in modernist movements, with an interwar spirit likened to Marcel Duchamp, celebrated for enlightening the conceptual spaces where photography and other arts like sculpture overlapped. Many of Finsler's works are kept in the prestigious Thomas Walther Collection. In the mid-1930s, while the rumbles of war brewed in

German-speaking lands, his transcendent techniques were indispensable for aspiring and fellow Swiss photographers.

Yet, for Bischof, in the authentic manner of someone with a prodigious gift yet initially unwilling to realize it, he had enrolled in Finsler's class with a weight in his heart, as he wavered over his true calling, often drifting to pursue painting before and during his early career. If the end of his life was a matter of fate, then it was also pure chance, as he is known to have said, that led to him down the path of his vocation. He sojourned to Paris in 1939 to paint, but his chosen university, the School of Applied Arts, was jam-packed to the extent that he was either discouraged, or repelled. It was that disheartening experience that prompted him to take his life into his hands, grab his camera and run headlong into the core of nature, where he immersed himself in sunlit, close-up photography, mastering flower portraits, and gaining a talent for abstractionism that comes with direct seeing into wild, organic forms.

His love for painting did not diminish with his subjective surrender to become an artist of the brush and canvas. Instead, he took to picturing geniuses of the classical medium through his uniquely inspired lens. Leica Gallery displays his 1954 portrait of the unmistakable Frida Kahlo, with an almost sideways glance, as he doubles the frame, half-observed ever so cleverly, by the corners of her easel and a box of oils. She is a stunning beauty, sitting in the wheelchair of her storied, bodily suffering, while behind her stand the pre-Columbian relics that she kept with her husband, the muralist Diego Rivera, which remain for wanderers and admirers to see in her preserved, Mexico City home.

In a way, Bischof earned his name by venturing down a road similar to Kahlo's attention to the gritty details of life's innate, inner suffering and the physical torments that rain down on everyone irregardless of color, class or belief, resembling the peculiarly Mexican inspiration for the Catholic deity itself mixed with the bloody, sacrificial rites of the Indigenous peoples, and from the Swiss perspective, of the total destruction of modern war. In 1942, with America on the frontline of World War II, Bischof freelanced for *Du Magazine*, publishing his first photo essays as a member of the Allianz group of artists, formed in 1937 to advance the theories of concretism and constructivism proposed by Max Bill, who worked primarily as an architect after studying at Bauhaus under Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee.

His founding Allianz comrades, many whose prestige is faded by time, such as artists Verena Loewensberg and Leo Leuppi, were united under a hybrid focus that merged painting with graphic arts, among other disciplines. Influenced by the ideas that they brewed independent of the feverish, embattled public, Bischof finally made his breakthrough in 1945, gaining much-deserved prominent recognition for the first time after photographing the devastation caused by the air raids of WWII. A photograph from that last war year is exhibited at Leica, shot in Germany, in the region of Baden-Württemberg, in the town of Freiburg in Breisgau, captioned: "A man walks through the destroyed city looking for food." It has a narrative sentiment, as the lone, post-apocalyptic figure appears as one descended from space, dreaming beyond the ashes and rubble for what scraps might salvage life. He walks upright, and is dressed neatly, with

dignity, ready for the remaking of the world as he holds a picnic basket in his arm surveying the brutal aftermath.

After a stint traveling through Eastern Europe, Italy and Greece with Swiss Relief documenting humanitarian efforts to repatriate and compensate for all of the wartime damage, Bischof then found spiritual fortune working in far-flung locales. He had learned the craft of conveying sympathy through an image by photographing the postwar oppressed before entering realms more deeply riven with historic injustice. For example, Leica shows his heart-wrenching piece from 1947 in Budapest, Hungary, captioned, "A train of Red Cross, transporting children to Switzerland" below the sight of a little girl staring through the glass of a train window as she rises to her feet, a paper tag knotted around her neck, as if she were transported goods.

Later, in 1952, he is in the town of Pusan, which became the capital of the battle-scarred country during the Korean War, and he sees a young boy wrapped in a rough blanket, solitary in the foreground of what looks like a gathering of soldiers during a time of mass instability when the fledgling Republic of Korea, now known as South Korea, was conceived out of the national split that has not ceased to undermine the prevailing world order.

Ultimately, there was a Christmas in Budapest, in all probability in 1947, while Bischof was on assignment with Swiss Relief, when he wrote to his father, a keen amateur photographer himself, although a pharmacist by day who could never shake the feeling of wanting his beloved son to take quieter, safer work. Bischof the younger would not give an inch of his resolve, saying that he was not after personal sensation, and detested superficial, commercial enterprise. He would keep exploring photography on the hardest of roads, seeking the means to change himself completely, not just as an artist, or journalist, but as a human being. No one can be sure if he felt that he had ever achieved his aspiration to personal wholeness, to self-transformation. At the very least he still wins over the hearts of those who see his photos, and through them, he changes the world, even if only little by little, one sliver of light at a time.

August 5, 10:54 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Sprawl

Sarkis, the elder statesman of Istanbul's contemporary art scene, is a wily trickster of *Large Meadow*, as he dots the conceptual field where his fellow artists exhibit, with his series titled, "12 Clocks for Large Meadow" (2018), that turn recently issued editions by the twentieth century master of the Turkish short story, Sait Faik Abasıyanık, into time pieces that will grace the walls of select bookstores and galleries throughout Istanbul.

It is in a gentle, lightly humorous fashion that his completely practical works are displayed. They express the fleeting rush of the summer season and the literary aesthetic of Norgunk while also paying homage to an artist of the word whose inspirations parallel that of his own, namely where immersion in French culture has bred particularly creative Turkish intellectuals. Sarkis has worked in Paris since 1964, and was only about sixteen when Abasıyanık died, but they were both exposed to the bohemian lifestyle that France offered Abasıyanık when he studied in Grenoble in 1930, as the liberal spirit of the country endured well after the war to celebrate Sarkis and his interdisciplinary installations in its inner circles.

At the smart and well-stocked literature shop, Robinson Crusoe 389, housed inside both Salt research complexes, in Galata, on the street known for its banks, and the other in Beyoğlu district, in the thick of Istiklal Avenue, Sarkis makes his mark on *Large Meadow*. At the Galata store bookworms look out over the Golden Horn and pass under highbrow shelves only to find a new copy of *The Cloud in the Sky* (in Turkish, *Havada Bulut*) by Sait Faik ticking by the head of the patient, helpful cashier. The same is true in Beyoğlu, only his short story collection, *There is a Snake in Alemdağ* (in Turkish, *Alemdağda Var Bir Yılan*) hangs on the wall, its three hands orbiting a point at the center to mirror the earth's rotation against the sun.

And from its new home in the storied back alleys around historic Pera, the young gallery Öktem Aykut hosts Sarkis, as a fresh copy of his *Unnecessary Man* (in Turkish, *Lüzumsuz Adam*) tells the time while lit prominently above the stairwell leading to the second floor, where, for *Large Meadow*, the artists Murat Akagündüz and Antonio Cosentino showed works in the minimalist interior, entirely given to its concrete aesthetic.

Cosentino is appreciated for his elemental forms thoroughly driven by the muses of nature, where wind-whipped grasslands swirl into the cavernous groves of some landlocked abstraction. His painterly drawings, and colored sketches overlap visual dissonances of urbanization and the wilderness with phantasmagoric vision, as he purifies the venturesome seafaring wonderment of artistry steeped in his unique brand of the naive, stripped of over-educated artifice.

Upstairs at Öktem Aykut Gallery, its *Large Meadow* show delights in his oil on canvas, *Cactus Four* (2017), picturing a surge of succulents in the style of cubistic impressionism, where the stand of cacti is painted as a patchwork of palettes. Only a single, circular form is left blank white, as to signify a celestial glow above the figurative plot of mixed earth tones and textures. His work is in like-minded company alongside the charcoal on paper series of seven pieces by

Akagündüz shown at entrance level, where he details the faint intimacies of plant life with his refined skills as a naturalistic, postmodern draftsman.

Descending into the cooling, inner reaches of Istanbul's district of contrasts, Çukurcuma, where countless storefronts purvey antique collectibles next to contemporary art, MARSistanbul preserves the refreshing air of an independent, cultural establishment not purposed for commercial ends. Pinar Öğrenci, its founder, director and often curator, is an accomplished international artist herself, who once set up her old architectural research station to spotlight provocative creativity, since screening untold numbers of powerful video works from around the world in her subterranean hall, where a smiling, enthusiastic guide named Suphi greets passersby on the lookout for the curiosities of *Large Meadow*. Its unfinished setting props up a Sarkis clock in the form of the book *Cistern* (in Turkish, *Sarnıç*) by Sait Faik, posted for art lovers to remember the hour as they delve into boundless spaces of expressive potential where time is not of the essence.

*ASJ IN* by the trans-disciplinary Peter Downsborough projects against the plain, smooth stone of the basement gallery, as the work teems with the peculiar visual vocabulary that has gained the artist prominent international recognition since the 1960s, training his constructivist, sculptural movements from an empty corporate tower with a view to a superhighway spliced by the window frames. Suphi, a conversational, self-taught Francophone with an itch to see the greater world, watches the ten-minute, black-and-white segment before leading eyes to six still photographs by Downsborough, which distill his singular talents for cinematographic composition despite the apparent meaninglessness of his subjects, a pile of wood, a city intersection.

Not easing his grin in the least, the bright and optimistic Suphi then prompts the wayfarers on his path to press on, specially praising Ark Kültür, for the unprecedented work of its nine exhibited artists, the most among the *Large Meadow* venues.

Around the corner from one of the main drags in Cihangir, where Istanbul's footsore come to take a break and gaze out to the horizon beyond the Sea of Marmara, there is a lush gate of leaves and vines, hung with vinous green climbers so much as to almost obscure any recognizable signage for Ark Kültür, a most upstanding operation in the business where style, craft and ideas merge into public manifestations of true novelty. Karin Sander contributed what is likely the first visible work, *Kitchen Pieces* (2011/2018), an amusing variety of fresh vegetables nailed to the wall. Its absurdity is comparable to the installation one floor up, titled, *The Garden* by Derya Yıldız, which to the average eye would simply look like some boxes with sand in them. Through a doorway on the upper level, a more redeeming piece is called *Ups* (2018) by Özlem Günyol and Mustafa Kunt, who placed decorative flanges in various dimensions in the form of multicolored poles that have a fantastical effect on the eye, displacing obvious environmental consciousness with imaginative color.

The seasoned contemporaries Selim Birsell and Ayşe Erkmén unsettle the dust below ground at Ark Kültür with two three-plus minute videos. Birsell's piece, *And they've heard the mermaids*

(2006) is a hypnotic treatise on the mortality of a half-sunken moored boat in a grainy, achromatic ambiance, while Erkmen's work is a collagist interpretation of films, titled *A Path* (2009) utilizing a clip from the American indie film classic *Mystery Train* by Jim Jarmusch.

"It is hard to say that *Large Meadow* has a specific goal or that it is shaped around a certain mission," wrote Ayşe Idil in recent personal correspondence on behalf of Norgunk and *Large Meadow*, in direct collaboration with Ayşe Orhun Gültekin, who walked into Riverrun gallery on a hot weekday while visitors enjoyed breathtaking photography by Silva Bingaz one story above a scintillating mixed media installation by Lara Ögel.

One could only talk about what it is curious about, what it wants to try and experience together. *Large Meadow* asks: 1.) 'Is it possible to activate the arts environment and venues during summertime, in August, when the city empties out and is especially stagnant in terms of contemporary art events? 2.) Can artists, collectives, alternative art spaces come together and produce a contemporary art event without sponsors, logos, or billboards? 3.) Is it really as hard as we are told to create, produce, and construct outlets of production, of sharing, and of independent discussions?'

"One can be misled by the name, however *Large Meadow* does not reference nature directly, it is not a call towards nature," wrote Idil.

It is more about the secondary nature that is found within us, about the disabled nature of nature that is forced upon us, than our relationship with it. Yet the greatest damage is to our relationship with time: we have lost our times, unable to see or weigh, accept our differences. *Large Meadow* is a call to think and discuss when to speed up and slow down in nature and the city, instead of the predictable call towards it. That is why these alternative spaces were lent to Norgunk Publishing for this inaugural gathering. Contemporary art is a pulsation forward and backward. It is open to every element, every technique, concept, and medium. This first meeting brings together twenty-nine artists and collectives, the next one with different artists, different ideas, and different compilation of vibrations.

August 9, 8:53 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Story

In his 2013 article for *Art in America*, titled "When Formalist Criticism Fails," the art writing professor and distinguished photography commentator, David Levi Strauss wrote about a controversial review published in the *New York Times* that was deemed racist and misogynist by 1,650 petitioners representing the upper echelons of the art world. As one of the signatories, Strauss decried its regressive outlook for, among more material issues, necessitating proof for what he called the "social function and effects of art."

He went further back, to 1977, citing a *New Yorker* piece by the critic Harold Rosenberg to cement his case as to why formalism, or aesthetics as it was once termed, should know its place as an anachronism in contemporary art writing, lest the culturally vitalizing intellectual practice devolve into what Strauss referred to, ever so persuasively, as "an unconscious formalist supremacy," a kind of thinking that buries the unsung and dims the brilliance of true novelty where creative work and social movements merge.

His appeal to reinvent critical language toward new and transcendent public perception, especially during times of popular change, is relevant to the nonverbal concept behind *No Story*, with its lack of curatorial, or artistic statements, or any noticeable textual elements beside the basic tags for each of the twenty-six artworks.

From the French New Wave of Jean-Luc Godard's best-dressed Left Bank criminals to the No Wave of Jim Jarmusch's underground New York freethinkers, film history, in many ways, reflects the power that even the latest curations of visual art in inner-city exhibitions preserve when they shed plot-heavy elements in favor of pure style, to express personality, character and idea over the mere logical thinking of end-to-beginning clichés.

And more, *No Story* is something of a performative metaphor for the summer season itself, when the charming, capricious world of Istanbul's contemporary art galleries goes relatively silent, turning to liberal customs of repose common throughout the country when the sun bakes, as movement slows and the city empties from the shores of the glistening turquoise seas that tempt south to north along the Bosphorus like a throat quenched to speechlessness before the crystalline natural beauty of the time-bending metropolitan region.

Inside the unflashy, three-level gallery space at Art On beside the Italian Cultural Institute, the sound of typing dominates the room, as the occasional looker enters to shop around for an experience in imaginative seeing while an expected guest is hurried into the back room down some stairs where muffled talk ensues out of sight from the art on display. They stand for themselves, the *No Story* works, unmediated by the personal histories of the artists' lives and processes, not even by catalog texts usually chock-full of erudite interpretations to chart newfound philosophical trajectories from starting concepts to the final products of bold, original vision.

Against the back of the upper floor of the loft-like warehouse interior at Art On, the wall-sized, 400-cm-wide work, *Untitled* (2007) by Mithat Şen fills the air with shades of black paint over goatskin mounted on fabric, and framed. Its amorphous, symmetrical patterns hold an abstract pose along with his more recent, *5 From the Series 'Istif III'* (2017). His seemingly nonrepresentational shapes resonate with the choice of subdued colors, of mottled crimson beside opaque ebony in his latter piece, materializing his sense of abstraction with a thoroughly distilled eye for visual arrangement.

They are sculptures of frames, and concentrations of his minimalist palette, reminiscent in certain ways to the structural motifs of the late Turkish painter Abidin Elderoglu. And next to his works are a series of ten mixed media canvases, *Untitled* (2018) by Erman Özbaşaran, which have fine, textural components, adding to the sensual effect of touch through sight.

As by the rough hand of a ceramicist whose fired aesthetic is firstly practical, Özbaşaran figures in the impact of color gradation within each piece and as a whole over the course of the 20x20-cm works curated in a neat row. Pale reds are run with streaks of olive green, as semi-transparent swathes of darkened space recall the esoteric spirituality of painted space as invented and perfected by the genius of Mark Rothko.

The unfinished, concrete steps down to the storefront window entrance are furnished with two rust, acrylic collages on canvas by Ahmet Çerkez, an artist had previously mounted his solo exhibition, *Stateless Maps* at Art On Istanbul in the late winter. His works that appeared on the gallery floor were taken directly from his solo exhibition, and which interestingly followed a very specific narrative related to the artist's family history.

A likely relation to the overarching definition of *No Story* is the fact that his pieces are all untitled. But his concept for *Stateless Maps* followed the self-reflexive exploration of his visual storytelling. Çerkez utilizes such images as skulls within peculiar cartographic designs, visualizing the route of his ancestral, migrant roots from Bulgaria to Turkey. It is particularly apparent in his, *Untitled* (2017), the larger, 73-cm-tall work of his two pieces at *No Story*, hung beside one of his more hypnotic works, which maintains a bird's eye view over a futuristic, microcosmic, computer chip urban grid, as was classically captured in the experimental 1982 film, *Koyanisqaatsi* by Godfrey Reggio.

In view of window shoppers who may have lost the way around Istiklal Avenue, and along the wall towards the door inside Art On are a pair of oil paintings by Evren Sungur, both *Untitled* (2018). It is a welcome, curatorial accompaniment with the techniques of Çerkez, as Sungur paints with oil way off-the-beaten trail of tradition. It is simply the case that his paintings do not look at all like oil paintings. The patchy surface appearance of his work seems more like pastel, or watercolor, and the aesthetic of his subject matter has the spastic air of street graffiti.

More, he utilizes geometrical lines to frame the representational content, another similarity to Çerkez, however indirect and unconnected. Finally, there is the polyester sculpture, *Untitled*



(2017) by Burcu Erden, of a headless, slouching, half-sunken humanoid figure leaning against the dividing wall invisible to the glaring masses from outside. Its ghastly posture and pasty white makes for a fine curatorial arrangement against Sungur's surrealist ensemble of a roped skeleton and graphic manikin.

The crown prince of peril, master of the flagrant eye, Ali Elmacı is a most welcome addition to *No Story* for the sheer bravura of his talent as a painter with a special command of neoclassical pictorial technique. His images are striking, simultaneously repulsive and gorgeous, conveyed through his mocking, satirical edge that is as sharp as it is irresistible.

A new work, *Don't You Dare Touch Me* (2018), is characteristic of his scale, at 200-cm-tall, its vibrant ring of violet pink flowers creates a mythical mood, with a figure front and center standing high and mighty over a languorous tiger. The person is fashionable, sporting gold-buckled slip on-shoes, and wearing a bright blue coat, as his face is that of a hysterically ecstatic emoji, beaming to near-implosion. Elmacı has a knack for balancing the waves of subtle and roaring social critique. His works at *No Story* tear to pieces concepts of visual narrative, instead rearranging them with a fiery intellect that rains down like the mystical apparitions of end times.

As in his mural at the garden in Arkaoda, a night spot that's all the rage in Moda, his bust portraits of men are topped with heads of hair that shoot out from the skull with screaming flames and ruined buildings. It is a sly device that he employs to portray the unstable emotional state of a man trying to hide while wanting to see others.

In his second *No Story* work, cheekily titled, *I Can't Reciprocate Your Feelings Osman VIII* (2017), his peculiar wiles range even freer, set to a color-coded smorgasbord that comments on the anxiety of being seen, whether to be young and beautiful, or popular and influential. On the other side of the coin, his depictions of the voyeuristic, often male creeps emerge from cavernous openings and descend on wings from the fierce, crisp-painted sky. Elmacı is a rare, instinctive artist of the visionary tradition, yet one who taps into the mainstream, individualistic psyche of the profane rather than the collective consciousness of the sacred.

August 16, 12:35 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Soil

When the storied seventeenth century Ottoman travel writer Evliya Çelebi saw the city of Kütahya he called it "the throne of Anatolia." Through his often fantastical, rose-tinted prose, he wrote that its "strong wall resembles a jeweled ring." He was almost certainly referring to its painted tiles that would beautify homes, mosques and churches for the next three hundred years till the global political upheavals of the early twentieth century stamped the old world order, especially in Turkey, as outdated.

Like its more famous kindred city known for ceramic art, İznik, a place practically synonymous with the tile painting aesthetic of the Aegean region, Kütahya has since lost its repute as a contemporary center of international commercial buzz sustained by traditional craft. The aesthetic signature of ceramic art from Kütahya is based on the fact that its wares were firstly purposed for mostly domestic use, although the city's artisans produced significant works for mosques, tombs and, to a great extent, churches.

The artisans of Kütahya are said to have worked more informally and were free to be more expressive than in İznik, where designs focused primarily on wall tiles and were generally commissioned by palaces and other such stately institutions. By the late seventeenth century, İznik had closed its pottery industries, leaving Kütahya with the responsibility to uphold Anatolia's unique contribution to the art of ceramics for buyers, traders and collectors throughout the world.

Although Kütahya ceramics were created with a greater sense of social and artistic freedom, the patterns and figures still tightly abide to its own collective style within its textured, fluid pigments that rise from transparent glaze. Particularly striking are the recurring shades of yellow that, even at a first impression, are one of many qualities that mark the art of Kütahya ceramics as utterly distinct from the purportedly higher-end work from İznik, and also from any of its far-reaching influences, which stretched from China to England.

At the foot of Mount Acemdağı, the western Anatolian city of Kütahya is surrounded by places like Eskişehir, which travelers know on the train route from Istanbul to Ankara, and also Bursa, the old Ottoman capital that lies across the Sea of Marmara just a two hour ferry ride away from the southern tip of the Bosphorus. Its present-day name is from the Old Greek, sometimes spelled Kotiaieion to the ancients who lived there for its fertile plains, plentiful water and thermal springs, yet were forced to defend the landscape to the death, likely since its earliest settlements were built in the third millennium B.C., during the Early Bronze Age. In the enlightened context of the Sadberk Hanım Museum, which has a permanent exhibition hall of archaeological artifacts acquired from Hüseyin Kocabaş extending from 8,000 year-old, Neolithic sculptures to Byzantine metalwork, the entire historical breadth of life in Kütahya is pertinent, as it conveys the immaculate detail, and erudite discipline that is inseparable from the Koç family's cultural preservation efforts.

In the aquatic environs of Büyükdere, the Sadberk Hanım Museum opens into the former Armenian-owned Azaryan Mansion only a short walk to Surp Boğos, an Armenian Catholic church founded in 1885 with a spectacular view of the green slopes that now descend in the shadow of the third bridge over the Bosphorus, dedicated to Yavuz Sultan Selim.

Inside the antique, wooden whitewash exterior, the historic residence is furnished with such decor as a large, painted canvas of the Koç family tree, headed by its founding ancestor, Hacı Bayram Veli, the fourteenth century, Ankara-born Turkish Sufi dervish poet. Around its majestic frame are the classical portraits of Vehbi Koç and his wife, Sadberk, and daughter, Sevgi Gönül, who was responsible for bringing her late mother's vision into the light of day on October the 14th, 1980, to inaugurate Turkey's first private museum. As a young girl in the 1950s, she often accompanied her mother on trips to Istanbul's popular Covered Bazaar, returning with treasures from antique dealers for her growing collection that leapt from 3,000 to some 20,000 items.

The museum's permanent collection has a display of Kütahya ceramics, most from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, kept beside a diverse array of pieces from İznik, as the ceramic art of the two cities is intimately intertwined. Behind its two polished glass cases, there is a sugar bowl from 1921 painted in typical, light Aegean blue with the Greek letters for Kütahya. Opposite the intricate floral patterns that embellish simple trays, jars, figurines and ornaments, there are large roundels bearing the eight most important names in Islamic history: Allah, Prophet Mohammed, the caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, and the Prophet's grandsons Hasan and Husayn. It is understandable simply by looking at the visual developments in the work, and when steeped in the clever, museological arrangement, how in the late nineteenth century, there was a revival in Kütahya ceramics due to renewed inspiration in creative dialogue with the legacy of İznik. In the spirit of Sadberk Hanım, her philanthropy and intelligence, the museum is a testament to her passion to preserve her cultural heritage in concert with the public, by collecting, repatriating and curating some of the finest creativity in the country by workers and masters of tradition.

In 1988, the Sadberk Hanım Museum won the "Europa Nostra" award, a pan-European representation tasked to prevent cultural endangerment. In that year, the museum presented its second wing to the public. At its first floor, temporary exhibitions run, such as the current Kütahya ceramics show, leading to an exhaustive store of archaeological treasures, like the Hellenistic sculpture of an African slave that the artist Fred Wilson applied to his *Afro Kismet* 2017 installation which transformed Pera Museum during the Istanbul Biennial in 2017

The resident archaeologist at the Sadberk Hanım Museum is Senem Özden Gerçeker, a kind, enthusiastic anglophone guide with a knack for storytelling. Her appreciation for Kütahya ceramics is deeply rooted in her knowledge of Anatolian civilization, where contemporary identity politics confronts the total gravity of the historical and scientific facts that all people have mixed roots firmly planted and growing tall in the rich, local earth for generations. While there are variances in form and technique, the art of Kütahya ceramics exemplify the shared human identification with a certain place on earth as a potential inspiration to identify beyond Armenian, Greek, or Turkish ethnic exclusivity, instead with simple, powerful acts of creation.

As the exhibition is titled, "Kütahya," it is an homage to the proud soul of the land. While the city's tradition of pottery goes back at least five thousand years to the earliest evidence of human settlement, the oldest pieces on display only reach back to the eighteenth century, for a number of reasons which senior researchers Hülya Bilgi and İdil Zambak Vermeersch explain in the thick, voluminous five hundred-page tome of a catalogue publication, which justifiably costs 300 TL (then \$49).

In the essay, "Tile and Ceramic Manufacture in Kütahya", authors Bilgi and Vermeersch describe the pre-eighteenth century knowledge vacuum as caused by rebellion, ruin and fire among other roadblocks to historical documentation and archaeological excavation. After detailing traces and remnants of early medieval Kütahya pottery, the authors write:

Although pottery production in Kütahya can be traced back to antiquity and the region possessed the necessary raw materials, few examples of tiles and ceramics dating from the 15th and early 16th centuries have survived and there is none that can be dated with certainty to the second half of the 16th or 17th century.

Within the relatively narrow window of historical time, about two hundred years from the early eighteenth to early twentieth centuries, the Kütahya exhibition represents a fantastic range of creativity on forms practical, religious and decorative; from the coffee cups that were all the rage before tea had entered the Turkish diet and the delectable stimulus of the African-imported bean had only recently gained a name, to the rose water sprinklers sacred to Muslims that the Ottomans had commissioned the Chinese to produce, as shown in the museum's permanent collection, and the seraphim-illustrated hanging ornaments of the Armenian church.

While the museum is far from Istanbul's core, where most of its unknowing audience wander in search of such sights as that which it preserves, there are talks of Sadberk Hanım's endowment moving to a larger space along the Golden Horn, where the Rahmi M. Koç Museum is located, though word on the street is that it will likely happen in the future, one not so distant as its past.

August 24, 1:50 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Worlds

In the year 1905, little four-year-old Fahrelnissa sat prim and proper for a family photo. She folded her hands neatly in her lap, and looked out from under her bouquet of dark hair, bow tied in pigtailed. The verdant stretches of Büyükada were lit with its signature reflective sheen, bouncing off the Sea of Marmara, as sun rays drifted over the sails and spires of Istanbul's mythic shorelines. Literally from the Turkish for "the big island," Büyükada is one among the forested, metropolitan archipelago where her illustrious, Ottoman family bore and raised her into a life of aristocratic dignity and humanist valor.

Behind her stood Cevat, her oldest brother, who she admired. They would lounge together, she at his feet, surrounded by his unrestrained taste for Damascene furniture, gleaming with geometrically patterned mother-of-pearl inlays set into the polished brown wood. For the rest of her ninety years, she would never forget how inspired she felt while listening to him scratch his quill pen onto paper as he sketched the beautiful girls he had met at the American college in Istanbul, and at Oxford University where he studied history. Although she had not the knowledge, or wherewithal, to sketch then as he would, she remembered those somnolent hours as the birth of her stimulus that led her to pursue a life in art.

And interestingly, not a decade later, Cevat would fire the national intellect with an upheaval of the moral imagination. For reasons yet resolved, he shot his father dead in 1914. Despite his stormy relationship with his family and the law, he went on to become the prolific writer, ethnographer and mythologist known as the Fisherman of Halicarnassus. It was one of many examples of her family members rising to heights of infamy and heroism. Notably, her sister, Aliye, became an important artist, as did her niece, Füreya Koral, a name synonymous with the birth of modern ceramics in Turkey. In painting, Fahrelnissa would transcend orientalist cliché to peerless renown throughout the world, as a woman, a Turk, a human being, an artist.

Dr. Adila Laidi-Hanieh, general director at the Palestinian Museum, is the perfect biographer to have written, *Painter of Inner Worlds*, the utterly comprehensive book on the life and art of Fahrelnissa Zeid, a woman who lived up to her name, which from the Arabic means, "the glory of women." Not only are her passages on Zeid's late life firsthand, but also her access to family documents and private collections makes for a depth of art historical analysis that is unsurpassed, both for scholarship on Zeid and on the wider subject of modernism in Turkish art. Her writing sensitively and respectfully observes how her stylistic developments and life changes commingled. She has an uncanny ear for the symbiotic relationships that Zeid sustained between her work and her many roles as a celebrated artist, an independent woman, a mother, wife and princess, to name only a few.

In many ways, Zeid was a woman and artist of the world. She planted roots in Paris, London, New York, Baghdad and Amman as sincerely as she would vitalize her professional and personal connections with Istanbul. It is no surprise that her biography appeared first in English, published last year by Art Books in London, where Fahrelnissa earned one of her highest distinctions as the

first woman from anywhere to ever hold a solo exhibition at the cutting-edge Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in 1954. The ICA hosted living legends of the day and till now - such as Picasso, Max Ernst and Henri Cartier-Bresson - and the Institute would not give another woman the recognition that Zeid held for another twenty years.

For her posthumous retrospective, Dirimart collaborated with Tate Modern and Deutsche Bank KunstHalle to show her works ranging from early Fauvist, figurative painting inspired by French artists like the nineteenth century orientalist Jean-August-Dominique Ingres, to her mid-career Abstract Expressionism and the portraits she painted throughout her long and very social life. The gallery-led publishing outfit, *RES*, respected for its world-class art criticism periodical, released the inaugural Turkish translation by Esin Berktaş and Çiçek Öztekin on the opening day of *Ode to Passion*.

With her father dead and her brother in jail for murdering him, Fahrelnissa and her sister Aliye walked to an expensive private school in patched, worn clothing. In turn, Fahrelnissa painted postcards and sold them to buy art supplies. She was a young teen with the voracious mind of a creative entrepreneur in love with learning, individuality and expression. Dr. Laidi-Hanieh references her voluminous diaries throughout the biography, as they are likely the richest primary source on her life. Zeid was a tireless diarist who journaled profusely, like a real lady of culture born in the wake of the turn-of-the-century and its waves of promise.

As the chapters of her life turn with effortless absorption, it is clear that Zeid had a gift for writing almost as monumental as her visual talents. Her prose is as ecstatic and refined as the masterpieces she saw and created. It was only natural, as she exposed herself to the works and personalities of the greatest souls of her generation, and simply read everything from Jung to Spinoza, Kierkegaard, and especially Rimbaud, whose verse provoked her to write poetry that her concert pianist friend Koharik Gazarossian set to music, all while she started two novels.

Outside of painting, her love for literature was only comparable to her avid enjoyment of a good, long swim. She was practically a fish on land at times, as she often stopped at nothing to submerge herself in the cooling currents of aquamarine locales like Ischia in the Bay of Naples, seeking refuge and revitalization in the living landscape. Dr. Laidi-Hanieh offers a keen, critical touch that gently, and yet still powerfully conveys Zeid as a person whose towering spirituality and creative energy could only be encompassed by her whole, undivided world. She never fit into presupposed and stereotypical compartments, whether in the countless reviews that critiqued and adored her work, often in repetitive orientalist terms. Even then, she did not force others to see her work as she did, even when her sources and muses might have been as different from outsiders and critics as Byzantine mosaics are to aerial landscapes.

In fact, her famous approach to semi-representational, large-scale abstraction arguably crystallized when she first looked out of the window of an airplane during her maiden venture to New York in 1950, and not, as was generally assumed, by the entangling intrigues of her eastern background. Yet, she does also mention a trip to Baghdad in 1938, during which time she painted

a group of traditionally dressed Bedouin women. The waving forms of her thickly colored palettes are reminiscent of Gauguin, Matisse, a characteristic blurring of the lens that incited increasingly contemporary artists to pursue pure subjectivity, to prioritize art beyond objects, towards an art free of objectivity's hypocrisies. In the years of 1944-45, her oils, *Bedouins Selling Yoghurt* and *Bedouin Women (Towards Abstract)* mark the watershed of her most substantial transformation, in aesthetics and technique.

Zeid was woman of her own making, who emerged from the Ottoman society to follow her bliss beyond the possessive traditions of her home and nation, to live a life at work on the labors of love that she gave to the world, and that will be praised for as long as the art of painting is seen and felt. It all began with the addition of a women's division to one of Turkey's first art schools in Istanbul founded in 1882 by the initial movement of Turkish painters influenced by European techniques, among them Osman Hamdi Bey. It was four years after offering enrollment to young, upper-class women when the rebellious seventeen-year-old Fahrelnissa ferried her way every morning from Büyükada to learn such skills as linear perspective.

As a young Turkish lady, she wore the customary "chador" wraparound garment over her shoulders, though, as a secular woman, not the veil. She was vibrant, and radiated charm. Soon, she was a mother of two children with a prominent man of letters for a husband only five years after entering art school. Then tragedy struck. It came with the scarlet fever that killed her firstborn Faruk, and sent her into a whirlwind of depression that she would suffer in various forms and concatenations until her final day. She could do nothing except paint to ease her pain. And paint she did.

September 21, 12:28 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Quartet

Before opening its pages to the world stage, *The Three Body Problem* leaped from the laps of nerdy students and dropout gamers and entered the forums of entrepreneurs and techies. Among the intellectuals of Chinese society, where the science fiction novel emerged in 2008 under the pen of author Cixin Liu, it became a sensation that broke literary stereotypes, and soon found its place within the mainstream readerships long dominated by realist fiction.

In his postscript to the American edition, which U.S. President Barack Obama read while in office to clear his head after the book first appeared in English in 2014, Cixin described his passion for science as the harbinger of narratives and ideas grander than any epic has encompassed, deeper than any form of literature bound to the humanities for, in his eyes, it is only by the cold, exacting structures of mathematics where the mind perceives furthest through creation, to grasp at the edges of outer and inner space.

About midway through the novel's astronomical heights, touching on everything from artificial intelligence (AI) to alien invasion and virtual reality gaming, told ingeniously against the propaganda-riddled backdrop of China's Cultural Revolution, Cixin titled one his more incendiary chapters, "The Universe Flickers." In it, he exhibits his bravura for visualizing generally unfathomable scientific concepts, like cosmic microwave background, which with his literary wit, he turned into such metaphors as a fluorescent tube and a lamp hanging in the wind. Stunningly, the flickering becomes signaling as he posits the notion that the entire universe communicates to its self-aware, intelligent life.

Entering the former Siniosoglou apartment building on Istiklal Avenue, renovated with an understated contemporary edge for the next generation of global creatives, the rectangular metal detector at Salt Beyoğlu serves as a captivating visual kaleidoscope, marked by a row of neoclassical columns that lead to a projection over a reception desk at the end of the hall, reading: *The Universe Flickers*.

The exhibition begins with the minimalistic, site-specific mural paintings of Navine G. Khan-Dossos, titled *Scenes from a Pre-Crime (Performance for Security Guards)*. Her rudimentary washes of pale, spherical colorations in striking transparent blues and pinks, beiges and grays, provoke seers to visualize nebulous mysteries from the origins of the universe. Delicately drenched against the industrial facade, her cloudy palettes work wonders around the borders of service doors and grated vents, and especially where coded to the apartment's exposed original ceiling designs and spectrums.

Her central concept recalls themes popularly known from Steven Spielberg's 2002 film, *Minority Report*, which drew from the imagination of the science-fiction writer, Philip K. Dick, specifically a collection of his short stories by the same name. Her interpretations consider how domestic space is transformed into a public venue in the context of crimes foreshadowed due to a precedent, whether known or unknown, as in the reoccupation of space amid the fickle,



subjective transience of the historical record. It is a topic especially pertinent to the tumultuous chronicles of properties in Istanbul, how they have changed hands, particularly where long abandoned Levantine residential districts and their bygone minority economies have since become touristic, cultural centers.

Khan-Dossos paints the emptiness of the past as forgotten and concealed, though still re-traceable by utilizing the discrete finesse of detective work while employing the muses of art. The multicolored, forensic rulers that border her monochromatic murals amplify the behind-closed-doors performance aspect of the work in conceptual continuity with the one hundred and fifty fleeting years of the building's usage.

"For my work, having people present in the space completes the work. The murals are about the architectural space of Salt, which is always related to the bodies that inhabit it. So, to see people investigating the volumes of the rooms my murals set out to create was exciting. The moment the work feels complete is when it is in relationship to the body of the viewer," wrote Khan-Dossos in a recent interview.

From the beginning of the process I was interested in the shared presence of the institution and its history as apartments and commercial space. There is a slippage there that can be exploited to talk not just about the building, but public and private space in the wider world beyond the galleries. The recent works done on the building have revealed that relationship, and the ceiling paintings are the anchor between these two realities.

Upstairs in the greater, floor-wide exhibition space at Salt Beyoğlu, a dark curtain awaits curious eyes to immersion in the dim hall where Merve Ünsal intervenes with three works, titled, *Outside Instead of Before* (2018), a two-channel video installation, *Listening to SALT Beyoğlu* (2018), a sound installation, and *Prop Surfaces* (2018), a print on textile. Under the interpretive placard rests a booklet, *Ignorance is Bliss* (2018), printed in English with the accompanying transcripts for *Outside Instead of Before*.

Anglophones are best informed by the publication, as voice-overs are read in Turkish. And the quality of the text is world-class, as cut up phrases stream like fine, contemporary, avant-garde poetry, outlining the ecological hemorrhages that have ensued in Istanbul as a result of extreme gentrification efforts amounting to an entire overhaul reconstruction face-lift for the ages. Ünsal projects a humanistic witnessing, as from the humble windows of a couple of inner city flats, where inhabitants espy the top-down excavation of post-imperial modernity in favor of what can only be described as a void of time and space, a bureaucratic black hole in full effect.

"There are ways to enter each and every work in the exhibition, I feel. In terms of my own works, I could say that as the voice-overs for the videos and the radio drama are all between 15-20 minutes, many people might not listen to the whole thing, but that's OK. I tried to imagine a constellation of sounds and texts and things that could be explored extensively or a glimpse of these things, visually or aurally, is also completely fine. I do think a lot about listening vs.

hearing and hearing through the grapevines, whisperings, utterances," Ünsal wrote in recent correspondence.

I am a user of SALT in that I use the institution and the space for different purposes on a daily basis. I use the reading rooms, the winter garden for working as I don't have a very specific studio practice; I attend the events as an audience member, and I have been involved with various public events and exhibitions, sometimes as a co-conspirator and sometimes more openly as a content producer. In that sense, it was a challenge to 'occupy' this space that I was already very familiar with. I wanted to respect the uses of the space and keep that in mind while producing work for and within this space.

Ünsal herself attests that, with her three interventions, she exhibits a relatively thorough projection of the psychosocial impacts of urbanization, detailing the uprooting of people and livelihoods with radio dramas averaging about twenty minutes in length, a duration not necessarily suited to the time most people will endure standing in a gallery, never mind in an alternative cultural complex exposed to a flood of new information and artistic media conveyed by unparalleled individual expressionism.

Similarly, the works by Anna Boghiguan and Rana Hamadeh are equally, if not more formidable, to casual observers. Boghiguan has conveyed her testament of the great catastrophe that is history with her visceral sketches, literally ripped fresh from a spiral-bound notebook, ranging across her personal cartographies stretching from her birth in Cairo to her Armenian ancestry and life as a contemporary artist.

The pieces, beautifully curated, hold an energy akin to the paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose canvases bemoaned the egregious facts of human relations with handwritten treatises scrawled over his figurative abstractions. In a related tone, she raised three-dimensional drawings on puppetry stilts from purple, seemingly blood-stained desert dirt.

Finally, the forty-five-minute opera composition installed with multifaceted, interactive trajectories by Hamadeh, *The Ten Murders of Josephine (The Tongue Twister)*, was readapted in the last year for the innermost interior hall at Salt Beyoğlu. Her volatile intervention is dense with methods of madness on a variety of legal motifs that tie all four artists together, inviting the public to come forward with a healthy, amoral skepticism for law and history, to ask new questions about where and how they, as humanity, stand, in a flickering universe.

September 27, 5:34 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Provision

Sarp Özer is one of five from the young team that makes up AVTO, a pithy outfit in the shadow of the Galata Tower down the jutting cobblestone street of Serdar-ı Ekrem, surrounded by a hollow hive of sleek storefronts, boutique clothiers, uppish cafes, trendy artisans. It's an appropriate place to raise a colorful and steady flag for new reserves, and to heft it vigorously against one of the most controversial fronts of gentrification in Istanbul, where the old Genoese character of the historic downtown district is increasingly extinguished in favor of an internationalist makeover that ends up characterless, like the first wave of fashionable commercialization everywhere, ultimately turning its soil vulnerable for corporate demolition crews to bear the fangs of more impersonal brands of business and development that await, crunching numbers like dreams.

But as Özer knows, there are alternatives. He had learned as much in Milan, where he studied visual arts under Bert Theis, and remains speechless with awe at the thought of him, considering his unorthodox teaching methods. "He was my teacher. He had a huge impact on me. He was not only an artist. Down-to-earth wouldn't describe him. He was a super curious person. When I went to the [New] Academy [of Fine Arts in Milan], I was 24. I had prospects and ambitions. He wanted to talk with us all day. He wanted to listen. He tried to learn from us," said Özer with emotion, and with a Turkish accent streaked with the Italian *largo* after his many years living, studying, working in the center of Milanese cultural life.

Bert taught visual arts, but it was more like an experience to listen to him. He was always talking about everything else besides art. It wasn't a visual arts course [with him]. It was more like self-negotiation. His artistic practice was not ornamental, or solely about exhibiting. It was mostly about participating, about engaging with the public. His thinking was not for an ad hoc kind of utility. He wanted to contemplate. He wanted to think, as an individual.

In Italy, Özer also studied under Marco Scotini, a curator best known in Turkey for his work on the significant Disobedience Archive at Salt Beyoğlu in 2014. He returned to Istanbul in 2016, the year Theis passed away at the untimely age of sixty-four due to cancer. Özer then worked at Salt, which, with its two, state-of-the-art, grandiose core locales, has become the pinnacle of the contemporary art establishment in Istanbul, rivaled by Istanbul Modern's renovations and Arter's upcoming museum in Dolapdere slated to open in 2019.

Theis, a Luxembourg-born artist celebrated for his "fight-specific" community activism in Isola, Milan, continues to be honored by the international arts community, not only in Istanbul at AVTO, but by the prestigious Luxembourg Museum of Modern Art, who, acquired one of his well-known works for its permanent collection, a piece from the 1990s titled *Philosophical Platform*. It is a public installation piece offering a venue for anyone and everyone to stand and be recognized, to do what they will, however they might.

The "V" in AVTO is a Latinized character replacing the usual English, "U." AVTO tempts newcomers to think through the word, "auto," in a conceptual, linguistic context. Last year, AVTO held two exhibitions, hosted a collective to translate the Xenofeminist Manifesto into Turkish and ran a series of lecture performances, all under the scope of programming research-based projects as an alternative to the monthly show turnover of a typical gallery. The idea is to activate the space, in the interest of dialectic community, as opposed to merely opening the doors for the occasional pair of eyes to drop in and pop out.

The quintet at the helm of AVTO each focus on different research themes. Özer specializes in archives, accelerationism and science fiction, especially based on his studies in gender and feminist theory. Doğa Yirik also works on archives, oral history and image theory. Oya Kalkavan concentrates on photography, and both have a past with Özer as fellow students in Milan, at the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, which had one of the only two curatorial studies courses in Italy when they were there. And lastly, Görkem İmrek distills Ottoman and oriental manuscripts as a scholar of Neo-Turkish identity, while Verda Tınımaz studies philosophy and focuses on theory-fiction and also accelerationism.

Informally, AVTO has simply become an excuse to gather resources and energy. Together, they upend art show conventions towards a brighter, clearer and more interactive future in which to appreciate and practice art in Istanbul. It is the case that one of the most popular avenues of creativity, likely second only to music, is too often flattened between sterile walls, and lifeless institutions that generally make most people draw a blank before wandering on devoid of lasting connections, thoughtless and inane.

AVTO makes subtle, though effective pedagogical efforts toward collectivism and a greater social awareness in the public with techniques that are specially relevant to the background story of *Provisional Green Space*, named after the designation of parklands in Isola that were slated for destruction by real estate projects, are that are now entirely paved over.

The exhibition is couched in the history of Theis's practical concept of "fight-specific" artwork to strengthen the presence of the Isola Art Center in Milan's contested core. In fact, the horizontal, leaderless organization branched out into the Office for Urban Transformation (OUT), also a project designed by Theis, and succeeded in overturning city efforts to transform the neighborhood into a fashion and design district. OUT also stopped the construction of a shopping mall in Isola on two occasions, although the building eventually went up, along with the Unicredit Tower.

*Provisional Green Space* catalog notes are punched with holes for regulars to file a dossier of works shown at AVTO. The floor is draped with comfy bamboo mats for readers to ogle over many of Theis's writings, such as in *Fight-Specific Isola*, published by Archive Books in 2013, which analyzes the dramatic confrontation and ultimately the losing battle that the local community and artist collective of Isola faced against waves of gentrification.

The story of Theis and Isola recalls the documentary, *Citizen Jane: Battle for the City*, which Salt Galata screened as part of its cinema series. Although from Canada, and a female journalist in a world of men during the 1950s, she defended the neighborhood integrity of New York City for generations to come. Cities are communities, she emphasized, not buildings. It is a success story that, sadly, Theis could not parallel through his revolutionary pedagogy and socially reflective artistry. Yet, his utopian, eco-urbanist ideas continue to influence his students, peers and a growing movement of city dwellers looking for ways to preserve historic aesthetics, and integrate the styles of the present before the overburdening future.

The interior design at AVTO, considering the angles at *Provisional Green Space*, has the effect of an optical illusion, as its lighting and mirrored walls give way to a screening room past the photo-montage installation flooring after the Bert Theis work, *Aggloville*, which conceives the notion of the concrete jungle as a type of urbanization integrated with vegetal regeneration.

In his vision, streets are lush with edible plants, and the buildings grow with fruit trees. It is an ironic affront to the reality of his beloved Isola Art Center in the core of Milan, which, in 2009, was defaced as the result of a municipal sale to a private American firm, ultimately becoming the grounds for a controversial, pseudo-ecological residential complex called the Bosco Verticale. In the backroom at AVTO, natural light refracts from broken brick and unfinished concrete into *Provisional Green Space* where the documentary *Isola Nostra* plays on loop.

Mariette Schlitz completed the sixty-minute film in 2007 in close collaboration with Theis, as it chronicles community resistance efforts in Isola, where Theis was a fixture. Schlitz spliced clips from twenty-seven exhibitions featuring two-hundred artists from Italy and abroad at the Isola Art Center, which had a neighborhood-wide presence. The utopian dream of Theis streamlines urban traditions of landscaping, commerce and art in neighborhood life in the face of belligerent, top-down gentrification. His ideas thrive in the works of his impassioned students, as at AVTO, which is already planning for next year's program to include Isola's fight-specific artists and the Errorists collective, who contributed significantly to the life and legacy of the Isola Art Center.

October 6, 3:19 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Disguise

The underground art space, Co-PİLOT, is in a purgatorial state, waiting four years at the time of this writing, running to return to its street-level storefront, PİLOT Gallery, a former night club that would look out over Siraselviler Avenue bustling with rims and swagger leading up to Taksim Square in the sleek neighborhood environs of Cihangir, where artists have always made homes, studios and lives out of the air, thick with hints of a long lost heyday. Its spot straddles the subtle zone that spells unbecoming change for nostalgic inhabitants who count the years that have marked the end of an era on one hand.

PİLOT opened in 2011, starting out in the shorefront quarter of Tophane, sharing the core district cultural scene with important galleries that have since moved, like Rodeo, which relocated to London in 2015, and The Empire Project, led by Kerimcan Güleriyüz, son of the notable artist Mehmet Güleriyüz, when a hotel bought him out over proximity to Taksim Square. And then, Daire Sanat left and returned to its apartment venue in Cihangir on Susam Street.

Downstairs from the tea-stained sidewalk into a basement loft, the young artist representative Gülce Özkara greets with enthusiasm, as she only recently assumed her new role to liaise with creatives and guests, to take storytelling walks through unseen worlds where the passions and experiments of radical thinkers take form and are seen anew, often for the first time, in the early light of discovery.

In that spirit, the works of Kubilay Mert Ural descend from the Netherlands to his birthplace, for his very first solo show in Istanbul. To weary eyes, his art might seem utterly amateurish, frowzy as a neglected stray cat growling in the dust of a forgotten alleyway. He is, in fact, a studied artist confident on the edges of the Naive, a tradition of art that eschews discipline and grasps for the unfocused corners where all sense of training and technique is thrown off. Historically, its most famous progenitor is Henri Rousseau, whose lack of education worked in his favor when Picasso saw pure genius in his paintings. Truly, it is a stretch to compare Ural to Rousseau in any other way outside of genre concept, as the technical mastery, mystic sweep and crystalline sharpness of such pieces as *The Repast of the Lion* (1907) define the late developments of a legend.

Interestingly, throughout the show, a lion appears very much like the disproportionately featured wild cat in Rousseau's classic masterwork, which is stunning for the detail of its lush, tropical background, but by a closer look reveals a very curious, apparently unskilled depiction. In turn, Ural repeats the painted image of the tiger four times in the show of thirteen works, projecting a sonic effect, as snarling imagined through silent visualization. Beginning with the opening piece by Ural on display at PİLOT, there are theoretical evolutions that the young artist prompts already in his bright, young career, currently an artist-in-residence at Rijksakademie Amsterdam at the promising age of thirty-two, with a multidisciplinary, trans-media background in everything from sculpture to music and solid curatorial experience under his belt.

*Cheese head* (2017) stares down gallery visitors till frozen at the head of a staircase winding down into the main exhibition floor below, further beneath the cold, encompassing earth. Ural apparently saw a vision one breakfast over a dairy-rich meal in which a slice of cheese looked back at him with a primitivist air, something akin to the indigenous African sculptural influence in Cubism, a movement Picasso popularized during the interwar period after the scholarship of Carl Einstein, a writer who discovered that his visual ideas had precedent in Africa.

Ural cut out the profile formed of the cheese he would have eaten, and in so doing, transgressed his traditional Turkish value system. To certain folks, it would have been a complete demoralization, to make art out of his food. But, to Ural, it is conceivable that the piece of cheese had shed its identity as physical nourishment, instead taking on the spirit of some artistic mode of being that he sought to contextualize. He epoxied it messily to a 23x23-cm mixed media frame, streaked with a minimalist black-and-blue facade over a single orange line floating above a beige palette, almost reminiscent of the otherworldly schemes of a Rothko.

Before sinking to PILOT's lowest, subterranean level, Özkara identifies *Cheese head* as the epitome of Ural's solo exhibition, with his knack for drawing out heavy themes in art history and world affairs from lighthearted acts of creative expressionism. Ural has all of the qualities of a nonconformist who blazes trails beyond the confines of academic curricula to traverse the reaches of novelty, to found original practices, with an act-first-think-later mentality.

Even after studying at Istanbul's prestigious Bilgi University, and the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam, categorization in art seemed to him terribly beside the point of his sense for newfound creation. Yet, with his residency at Rijksakademie, and an upcoming show there in November, he is making his mark, officially, as Istanbul's man in Amsterdam, where he is in his element. He was then slated to exhibit works at Ellen de Bruijne Projects in April and Art Basel.

Ural is absorbed in the power of the future, where anthropocentric, earthly meaning is relative at best, and nonexistent overall. It is a philosophy reminiscent in the avant-garde jazz of Sun Ra, who was one of the most successful recording artists in history, teaching his band across the decades to think outside of the planetary box, to play like Martians. On that expansive, cosmic path, Ural gains the space, awareness and vibration by which he gains perspective enough to align with the creative forces of the universe. In fact, his thought process as a musician, in league with the interplanetary notions of Sun Ra, prompted him to install an untitled piece that is most stupefying among the works at *Earthlings and the Space Problems*, as it is nothing more than a container for a foreign cleaning product with its printed lettering blocked out with tape, so as to convey the aesthetics of an album cover.

By zooming out from the human perspective, he then espies the activity of daily life with psychosocial explorations into the darkest, nether realms of being, where consciousness folds under the void manifest in the complete annihilation of reason. For one of his most significant, largest pieces, *Untitled* (2017), covering the wall at dimensions 142x134 cm, he has President Trump strung up by a satellite, orbiting the Earth, which as an homage to tacky, humanitarian

campaigns for global diversity, is rounded by figures standing atop its surface who represent the haggard, volatility of human life on the planet. Dehumanized people, and the occasional animal, are poised with unsavory vulgarities referencing global chains of violence and the desensitizing deluge of disfigured life common to the news cycle and internet culture.

Most of the still works and installation objects at *Earthlings and the Space Problems* are untitled, except for two, *The power of the future* (2012), a compact, mixed media piece with tiger stripes behind a miniature painting of two enigmas in a dim landscape, and *XO* (2017), titled after a Beyonce song, one of his tongue-in-cheek barbs, a broad, 300cm-wide pastel on cotton reanimating her controversial music video intended to honor the victims of the 1986 Challenger disaster, when the entire crew of a space-bound craft went up in flames. NASA had responded with a stiff upper lip. They were not impressed. It is just the sense of humor that Ural conveys well, obliquely dark, to the effect of a sideswipe against the collective subconscious.

In his paintings, he portrays a dualism among his human subjects, mostly to exaggerate the themes of power and exploitation, age and history, the cruelties of civilization distilled to the wrong kind of touch between man and child, colonizer and colonized, and all over a simple game of ping pong between the Grim Reaper and the Prince of Darkness. It's a gothic aesthetic that churns beauty out of the seemingly ugly, emphasized to abandon with his garage rock, garbage grunge approach, leaving imperfections, tears, smears, and dissonances in the form and color of his depictions.

And finally, his pair of video works at PİLOT run amok on the thrusts of dysfunction in the human family. *Wife Beater* (2018) follows a woman as she races desperately from the voyeuristic lens of her assailant, nipping at her heels as her blouse comes undone and she hysterically reaches for the empty space before her. His second video artwork is a collage of his collected, archived snippets and clips documenting his eccentric past as an artist-in-the-making.

October 13, 3:05 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Cityscapes

The eclectic triad behind the Oddviz collective all hail from Ankara, and were born in the same year, 1983, placing them as three among a generation who remember life before the omnipresent pervasions of digital experiences and personal computers, when growing up meant dirty hands, scraped knees, backwoods forts and getting lost. By the time academia bared its sterilizing fangs enough to calm the wild spirit of youth during that pre-digitized paradigm into formal training in standardized disciplines, the early waves of new media had begun to crash ashore on the teenage consciousness of the 1990s, with the affordability of handheld video cameras and other recording and playback devices with which to possess and remix reality.

That old world flowed past human eyes with a slow fade. Contemporaries then embraced the fleeting quality of existence with a full heart, void of virtual alternatives, immersed in direct perception. Audiovisual stimuli were not as thoughtlessly dismissed within instantaneous, prefabricated frames built to take and trash the increasingly trivialized present, influencing bad habits since popularized to abandon by social media addicts and the reckless consumerism of the global middle class.

As artists with an intuitive sense for the evergreen quality and creative pliability of contemporary knowledge, Oddviz uses digital technologies to conceive photogrammetric virtual installations. It's a concept that combines a variety of shared, technical, and artistic skills in new media software and equipment, allowing the collective to mine the formative curiosities of millennial youth with a common knack for computer innovation.

Oddviz are the elders of an increasingly auto-digitized generation, inspired by efforts to document and visualize the rapidly changing fronts of destructive urbanization around the world. Erdal İnci, for example, is a painter by education and generally the best known artist from the Oddviz crew, gaining notoriety in the nether world of Tumblr GIFs in 2013 and with the recent Times Square installation of his video work, *Centipedes* (2015). He experimented with digital media as early as 2002, and previously worked with Art On as an individual artist, yet has since dedicated himself to Oddviz and its "Inventory" series, containing hundreds of photogrammetric models to create virtual installations.

Oddviz reclaims the preemptive drive of millennial youth to prompt digital revolution, employing its latest advances towards hardened, photorealist insights into the vanishing cityscapes of the globalized world, in the process spotlighting zones of collective amnesia and public negligence that come when people are oversaturated with streams and threads of vivid online content, yet do not even seem to notice, or at least remain silent, when the physical reality around them is altered overnight, or slowly disappears, whether by a sleight of overreaching human hands, or by the foreboding changes expected from the planet as a whole.

Serkan Kaptan, an environmental engineer by training, also has a strong background in artistic disciplines such as sculpture, and Çağrı Taşkın is the architect of the clan, yet each individual in

Oddviz holds the skills of the collective, fully capable of producing the creative work of the group alone.

Oddviz began as a trio of high school friends in Ankara. On entering university and later the professional world, they pursued separate paths apart for a decade, developing themselves in the diverse fields that they now bring to the table in Moda when hashing out the next concept with interdisciplinary approaches that have made for an exciting visual blend for the contemporary art world in Istanbul, foreshadowing a highly international presence.

In 2016, they went on a trip together to Mardin, packed a surveillance drone and DSLR cameras, to produce a 3D model of the ancient, hilltop city in Turkey's southeast. Executing techniques in photogrammetry brought them together to form Oddviz, the umbrella identity that they have posted behind on various platforms, including Twitter, which features the collective's entire project chronology since its inception at the Dara necropolis in Mardin, uninterrupted and solely dedicated to creative works.

A day after first posting on social media, Oddviz began to experiment with the 3D form of Mardin's old town, which they captured using photogrammetry in just a single day, folding its shape into a virtual cube. The initial series that they produced was called "Contextures," also starting with models of Istanbul's abandoned Jewish orphanage in Ortaköy, the El Orfelinato. A similar work released as the first official Oddviz artwork in May of 2017 unraveled the interior of a hotel in Nişantaşı with 10,000 photographs, earning the young collective a clip in *Time* magazine. Its design involved a dynamic manipulation of virtual lighting, which is central to the meticulous vibrancy exhibited at the show, *Inventory*.

While the techniques used by Oddviz are also employed by archaeologists, architects, geologists, and mapmakers, the collective focuses its efforts in the visual arts context. In fact, although the three artists are extremely well educated as academic researchers, Kaptan, for example, holds a doctorate from the Ecological Sciences Institute at Boğaziçi University, they gained working knowledge of photogrammetry and 3D modeling by watching instructional YouTube videos.

"It's a technique for the new generation. It's 3D, photorealistic. We manipulate the models using Agisoft PhotoScan. We stitch them all into a 3D model with photographic texture. Our first works were architectural works. For the last year, we have been working on the Inventory series. Taking pictures in a building requires bureaucracy, permissions from the owners, limited time, therefore we started shooting in public space," said Kaptan, standing proud with İnci before the photogrammetric virtual installation *Kadıköy I* (2018) mounted on an acrylic Diasec print, relishing in the fruit of his labors with his old chums from Ankara, exhibited brightly inside the core downtown gallery at Art On Istanbul only a few steps from Pera Museum.

In Kadıköy, they started circling the painted, concrete bollards that, until recently, complemented the tram-lined thoroughfare of Bahariye, central to the neighborhood for its cultural vitality, photographing them at every angle.

They did the same with quirky landmarks iconic to locals, like a graffitied car junked for seven years along a street famed for its night life until it was towed away only months ago, not long after Oddviz photographed it. Sadly, the radiance of the bollards has faded. Once the medium for artisans and craftsmen who beautified them with traditional Turkish floral patterns and hand-knit yarn, the public objects were recently covered with monochromatic paint, courtesy of the municipality. The accompanying piece, *Kadıköy II* (2018), another photogrammetric virtual installation, further condenses such bygone aesthetics of public good into a kaleidoscopic ball pool intermixed with street stands.

The gleaming photorealism exhibited by the eight stills and two video works at *Inventory* is accented by the spontaneous spectrum of inner city life as it douses and smears every last surface with the mark of unselfconscious, collective human expressionism. It is a repetitive, eye-popping effect ingeniously realized by the pieces from New York City especially. The sculpted form of the bull appears paralleled from Kadıköy to Wall Street in *Manhattan I* (2018), a photogrammetric virtual installation keying on the fire hydrant as a symbol for street culture in the Big Apple, where cutouts of sidewalk are raised to the heights of skyscrapers, upending the classic visualization of wealth inequality in the city that is sleepless for many reasons.

As a moving image, *Wall Street* (2018), a 4K resolution single channel video loop, trains the eye to reimagine light as a purely digital phenomenon using Global Illumination (GI) technology. A day of moving sunlight passes in under three minutes above the confrontational pair of cast bronze guerrilla installations *Fearless Girl* (2017) and *Charging Bull* (1989).

In Venice, the 4K single channel video loop, *Acqua Alta* (2018), exhibits the technical artistry that Oddviz advances in its digital rendering of water, which, in comparison with the light of the New York piece is not as riveting, though what it lacks in visualization, it makes up for in its statement. According to predictions formulated by climate change scientists, rising water levels along the storied canals of Venice are due to sink the entire open-air museum of a city in a matter of decades.

October 18, 3:45 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Palette

Eighty years her senior, Fahrelnissa Zeid watched her two-year-old granddaughter Nissa Raad play and thought to paint her portrait. The elder Turkish artist from the island of Büyükada off the coast of Istanbul had long married into the Iraqi royal family living in exile in the Jordanian capital of Amman following the tragedy of July 1958, when King Faisal II and several of his relatives were murdered in a military coup in Baghdad.

Zeid spent her last years immersed in the desert city couched in its sandstorm wilderness where Bedouin children roamed through distant mirages, goats in tow, living off the harsh land. She appreciated how its Roman amphitheater defines the downtown core, and often ventured to espy the pre-Islamic architecture of the Nabatean Arab civilizations in the countryside.

When she was not absorbed in any number of her late pieces, she taught her peerless approach to painting craft to eager, young students like Adila Laidi-Hanieh, who would become her biographer when she published, *Painter of Inner Worlds* by the London-based Art / Books in 2017. The lavishly detailed, bountifully researched book was recently translated into Turkish by *RES*, a small press based in the Istanbul gallery Dirimart, which showed a retrospective of Zeid in its expansive Dolapdere location, coinciding with the exhibition of ten new paintings by Princess Nissa Raad.

Titled with a counterintuitive sense of aesthetic juxtaposition, *The Sweetness of Lemons* was held in a more compact, complementary gallery site in the upscale neighborhood of Nişantaşı, where the abstract, mixed media canvases by Raad are mesmerizingly compatible surrounded by the cultural air of sleek fashion boutiques and nouveau riche apartments overlooking parklands that exude the nineteenth century European lifestyles of the bygone aristocracy ascending from the pearly, ornate influence of Dolmabahçe Palace.

The first name of Nissa Raad, is, in fact, shared with her grandmother, spelled Fahrelnissa, and meaning, "the glory of women." She signs her paintings as such, in the calligraphic Arabic script. Yet, despite the parallel Zeid retrospective, her show, *The Sweetness of Lemons*, makes no direct critical or historical references between grandmother and granddaughter in the context of the art and the creative processes that frame the works.

Whereas other luminaries in her family pursued a variety of artistic disciplines to advance Turkish cultural production into modernity, from the avant-garde ceramics of Fureya Koral to the literary wiles of the Fisherman of Halicarnassus, one chosen medium by Raad is abstract painting, a path that her grandmother pioneered from the region unsurpassed for her visionary techniques and mammoth scales, merging Orientalist perspectives with her signature blend of multiethnic authenticity as a consummate twentieth century Turkish woman, and a devout princess who married into Arab royalty.

“It is difficult to me to discuss my art without expressing how much my grandmother's work has affected my own. I feel her guiding me, yet at the same time telling me to find my own approaches and techniques. The artists of my family were all "risk takers" to a certain extent- especially my grandmother who broke boundaries in many different ways - so this is something I seek to do as well," wrote Raad by email.

Fahrelnissa Zeid's earlier works were not abstracts, and like her I was initially drawn to the figurative. For this exhibition, *The Sweetness of Lemons*, I felt like delving into abstraction and losing myself in it purely because it was something new to me and I'm very glad I did.

By the time Zeid conceived her oil painting, *Fahrelnissa* (1983), she had already fused her lifelong work in portraiture with elements of the tradition-inspired, eastern Mediterranean geometric abstract expressionism that has arguably best identified her as a leading visionary in one of the twentieth century's greatest unsung modernist movements where the Turkish and Arab art worlds intersect.

Named after her beloved granddaughter who charmingly took her name, the piece has a delightful gravity, as the two-year-old Raad stands from head-to-toe adorned in a ceremonial dress that falls over her legs with a plush umbrella of crimsons, turquoise and ebony, and tightens around her midsection in the fashions of antiquated, European dress. From her puffed shoulders down she grasps a lacquered pot of exotic fruits, and wears a spike headdress befitting her majestic, though petite presence. She looks out through the beautiful, entrancing eyes of her grandmother, oval saucers of a penetrating, chestnut-tinged coffee hue.

"I'm very happy that my first exhibition in Turkey coincided with my grandmother's and it's very special and sentimental to me. Istanbul has become such an art hub and I am thrilled to have been a part of a very eventful art week this September, particularly at such a prestigious and prominent gallery as Dirimart which has proven to be a driving force in the art world, both in the region and globally," wrote Raad.

All of the 10 pieces in this exhibition were created with the same repeated process of random chaotic splashes of color, followed by a reevaluation of what is necessary and what isn't. Again I relied heavily on texture which is something I find very appealing. This painting below in particular is one of my favorites because of the contrasts of not only color, but of texture as well.

Before embarking into the empty canvas space that would become, *The Sweetness of Lemons*, Raad felt she needed to experience a paradigm shift in her art practice, and to test her creative boundaries, ultimately questioning how she might see herself as a painter. Her works foreground the element of texture.

In light of a new Raad painting, seeing is feeling. And more, random spontaneity and technical variety are the founding principles behind her process. She is demonstrating uninhibited, newfound freedom as an artist. While she may have ways to go before she breaches the envelope

of truly critical and unprecedented originality from a theoretical perspective in the wider art world, especially in historical reference to Zeid, she is showing the type of audacity that is the very legacy of her family heritage in the fine arts.

Against the off-white lighting at the Dirimart gallery in Nişantaşı, her calculated splotches of vivid reds, purples and oranges commingle with transparent blues, drip marks that, milky against some canvases and inky in others, are reminiscent of the abstractionist master Abidin Elderoglu, who recently had a posthumous retrospective accompanied with a comprehensive book publication of his life work produced by Dirimart as well.

The works are unique from each other mostly with respect to varying color schemes, which spark and fade across the frames, dialoguing brightly with emptiness and visually evocative of lily ponds. Only one piece, *NR05* (2018), is more opaque in its composition, filling the space with an overlap of aquatic, liquid shades textured with swirls of action paint that seems to have fallen ever so slowly, gently onto the exquisitely succulent palette of waterlogged forms.

As a young artist from a marginal locale on the contemporary art map, the thirty-seven-year-old Princess Raad stepped into the global limelight as a Middle Eastern artist with her first exhibition in Turkey on a consciously radical note, with respect to her personal background and aesthetic direction. Not only is she realizing herself artistically within a genre overshadowed by the defining reputation of her grandmother as an abstract painter, but she has shed the cartoonish appeal of her earlier works in favor of a creative path that remains precarious for local audiences and collectors, imaginably almost as much it was when Zeid began to morph her observational objectivism into abstractions with a surrealist edge.

Yet, she has retained her special approach to textured colors, which have a watercolor effect, charged with luminous, geometric vivacity. Surrealism began by juxtaposing irrational images, like sweet lemons. As the illustrative and figurative beginnings of Raad and Zeid show respectively, to observe daily life in the Middle East in its outstanding modernizations is to perceive the surrealist inspiration.

"The art scene in Amman is growing quickly; there has been an emergence of many new galleries and art spaces as well as various different art events in recent years aimed at showcasing established artists as well as emerging ones," wrote Raad.

The [Jordanian] art scene is, however, on a much smaller scale to that of Dubai and Istanbul, but more and more opportunities for growth are evident. I myself am constantly inspired by my city, Amman, and all my early works are evident of that.

October 25, 12:39 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Shore

In the midst of a fleeting cold front descending with the Black Sea winds of autumn, Antonio Cosentino wove through the notorious Istanbul traffic on his bicycle to Riverrun, a downtown literary cafe and unconventional, multi-level gallery, also housing Norgunk, an art book publisher. He exuded a bright, youthful demeanor, his hair tightly bound into a top-knot as is fashionable among eclectic Turkish men. He wore a cozy, knit sweater vest over a loose printed shirt, eyes beaming, smiling radiantly. His light, elastic presence is a testament to his full life on the edge of reason where the fictions of his singular imagination and broad experiences within and without the known world have commingled to unravel every riddle, knot and puzzle that might pose for a fixed view of reality.

As a dyed-in-the-wool creative, Cosentino has his hands deep in the pockets of various artistic disciplines, from literature to music and a host of practices encompassing everything from painting and installation, to sculpture and performance. In the summer, Riverrun exhibited his vivid, psychedelic canvas, *Cactus Three*, (2016) at Öktem Aykut Gallery, together with a quirky floor plan of concrete models and neon lighting for the off-season, citywide collaborative show *Large Meadow*. The namesake of his exhibition produced by Riverrun is after a story by the fabled "island dweller," Sait Faik Abasıyanık, the so-called Chekhov of Turkey, praised as the preeminent master of Turkish short fiction. Cosentino is also expressly inspired by the French writer Julien Gracq, specifically his best-known 1951 novel, *The Opposing Shore*, about two fictional Mediterranean countries and the war they wage for three centuries.

The blurred lines and contested relationships between fiction and truth in social history and its manifestations in daily life have ever been integral points of action and reflection for Cosentino throughout his long, dynamic and continually vital international career. Such themes are all the more relevant while his piece, *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos* (2013) resurfaces in the bunker of Riverrun, accompanied by drawings on paper, *Sketches* (2013), detailing his graphic research as he endeavored to craft the hull from fastened rectangles of tin, inspired by the ubiquitous, versatile material scattered about Istanbul, mostly seen as recycled containers for Anatolian staples like oil, cheese, olives, often filled with mortar to weigh the base of signposts. As an autodidact polymath fusing manual laborer and conceptual art, he designed the ship to the dimensions of the Soviet battleship *Aurora*, iconized by the 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*, and built every intricate aspect of it by hand in four months.

Before envisioning the piece, he received an invitation to work with the commercial gallery Bergsen & Bergsen in the hilltop, skyscraper district of Gayrettepe, which had furnished its swanky showroom with over a dozen luxury yachts. Cosentino, in his characteristic style equal parts witty and eccentric, protested the mechanical, replicability and industrialization of art as an artist aiming to reclaim the innate poetry of creative human effort.

At the same time, he sought to further the marine aesthetic at the gallery with an ambitious, microcosmic invention, not only to mirror the physical presence of seafaring vessels, but to

traverse the psychological plane where narrative thought and industrial manufacture converge. In fact, as is shown at the Riverrun bunker in the form of a book of tickets, he had placed adverts in national newspapers offering a theoretical bon voyage for two Turkish liras (then \$0.37) to any takers on his getaway ship of dreams.

Finally, his performance, *Escape from Marmara* (2013) rounds out the exhibition in the form of a ten-minute-and-fifteen-second video demonstrating certain motifs in Sait Faik's story in dialogue with the mythology of Istanbul, in which Mehmed the Conqueror is said to have overthrown the spiritual heart of the Greek Orthodox cosmos by a surprise attack transporting a naval fleet overland, usurping Constantinople with a feat comparable to the ancient Carthaginian general Hannibal's alpine invasion of Italy.

In the short fiction of Sait Faik, and in *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos* in particular, the author ingeniously evades the usual pitfalls of identity politics that haunt most Turkish and Middle Eastern literature and its reception, especially by Western critics. Greek minorities in Turkey, for example, are generally tokenized and typecast in cultural work.

Instead, the "island dweller" humanizes his Greek relations in the multiethnic Anatolian neighborhood village tradition, sharing customs and territory as steadfastly as the insatiable taste for fish and *raki*, reveling in the good old deliberations of premodern perennial rhythms of life lived with as little artificial, sociological definition as possible, to simply and liberally enjoy the rolling, seascape vistas of the Prince Islands archipelago in the Sea of Marmara, as on Burgaz (known as Antigoni in Greek), a serene isle where Sait Faik lived, surrounded by olive and fig groves sheltering remote, though welcoming monasteries.

Cosentino confronts the intercultural nexus of the mixed Greek and Turkish presence with the public in Istanbul with *Escape from Marmara*, literally pulling the girth of his tin ship through its streets and promenades to display his peculiar brand of insight and intuition, reminding everyone fortunate enough to have come in touch with his work in the last five years that society is afflicted with a spectacularly blinding illusion, the groundless claim that certain peoples must be mutually exclusive in the event of a national project.

It is a dangerous way of thinking generally schemed as a requisite to modern nationalism, all the more asinine in Turkey, home to ethno-linguistic pluralities since time immemorial whose complex social fabrics remain beyond the normative, categorical reckonings of Eurocentric historiography.

As is clear from his name, Cosentino has roots in the multigenerational Italian diaspora, particularly as it flourished in Asia Minor during an age lost to time when the bygone fabrics of multicultural, ancient civilization went hand-in-hand with premodern imperial identity, a reality that ensued for the better part of human history. His parents were the fifth generation of his family from Italy to reside in Turkey, yet his ancestral language was not passed on to him. In his art practice within the context of *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos*, he affirms the ongoing, increasing



importance of experiential multiculturalism by contesting regional narratives in the metaphor of a voyage on the literary myth of his ship that, by his hands, has emerged as a palpable figment of reality on the common earth.

Despite living relatively isolated on his island, Sait Faik enjoyed recognition as an honorary member of the Mark Twain Association in the United States a year before his untimely death at the young age of forty-seven due to cirrhosis, a deadly condition said to have resulted from his alcohol abuse and bohemian excesses. Yet, his influential story, *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos*, only about six pages, remains untranslated in English, as with most of his work, considered fundamental to the development of contemporary Turkish prose fiction.

Cosentino is not only an avid reader moved by his writing to the point of making artwork, but also as a writer himself. He composes poems and short stories with a deft knack, preferring a creative, fictive approach to art writing over the mainstream objectification of artists and the art they exhibit publicly as mere personalities and products of popular culture and commercial exploitation. Interestingly, a collector bought his oversized sculptural installation, *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos*, only to allow Cosentino, and galleries like Riverrun to exhibit it freely in the interest of public appreciation.

"When nationalism was the great pursuit in the world, Turkish literature went through a phase where there were very good examples of literature, but poor execution of minority characters for a long time. Our land, Turkey, has a lot of prominent minorities who are a big part of our mutual welfare. Sait Faik, when he wrote *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos*, about a twelve-year-old Greek child, Trifon and his grandfather, he made those characters well-rounded. They are not minorities. They are people," said Cosentino, a vibrant artist with a promising future and a storied past as one of the founding members of the Hafriyat (Excavation) Group, a defunct collective that prompted shows and art movements from some of Turkey's most radical makers out of a space in Karaköy for well over a decade.

*"The Stelyanos Hrisopulos is not about two Greek people. It's about people."*

November 2, 12:28 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Metamorphosis

The word pairing, cellar door, is not beautiful for its meaning. Yet, its sonic aura is said to have transfixed geniuses like philologist J.R.R. Tolkien and poet Edgar Allen Poe as the Victorian heyday of Romantic poetry unraveled before the fin de siècle, toward new inventions of language, throwing off the naturalistic formalism of the classics in favor of the supernatural dynamism of the future. It was a trend that sought the naive purity of the modern imagination bound only to the present. The ways in which people wrote, read and listened to words and made art changed, coinciding with radical redefinitions of the relationships between mind and matter, individuality and creativity, society and production.

It also coincided with a violent confrontation further devoid of reason, strangling everyone under the arms of industry, regardless of economic distinction. Even elites among the wealthiest of Ottoman families would not escape the fate of history, presaged by ideological breakdowns in the arts. Comte Moise de Camondo, the son of Sephardic Jewish bankers, would disappear from the title of his inner-city mansion now known as Adahan, which lures locals and travelers alike to its stunning rooftop cafe and basement art gallery.

From the heart of Istanbul's traditional European district of Pera, not a single descendant of the Camondo family would live to see the current, stylish renovation of his former residence, built in 1874 when he was only fourteen. His entire progeny would fall to combat and genocide in Europe, obliterated by two world wars that ensued, and continue in other forms, as a result of the nationalist power struggle for control over the global economy. Around a well-kept alleyway near Kırathane<sup>24</sup>, an exhibition space for the literary community and the temporary location for Istanbul Modern, finely procured marble steps lead to a sleek elevator past the hotel reception.

At the underground level, there is a cellar door. By any ordinary interpretation, the door itself would be negligible, simply an object to mark and divide a way through which someone might pass into the interior. At the same time, its symbolism, to signify it in speech, carries a wholly other dimension, one defined by nonessential grace, by the pure elegance of the sound. Within that awareness, crossing the threshold where idea and sensation merge, the primary theme of *Metamorphosis* is clear, encompassed by the old, dusty ambiance of the rough brick archways and unmoved medieval metalwork centered by a well now covered with soil to complete the otherworldly curation of twenty-five mercurial works by sixteen broad-ranging artists.

Tima Jam, who founded her artist agency Blue Rhino in 2010, is unique in her efforts to bridge the Iranian and Turkish art worlds. Her shows, *Metamorphosis* among them, offer visual insights into the comparative light where Persia and Turkey share an inner sense of direction. Inspired by intimate, personal revolutions that spark reformations of daily consciousness and direct perception into such inner growth spurts as that gleaned from creative visions and philosophic contemplations, Jam organized *Metamorphosis* after a number of studio visits in Iran and in concert with her bustling network in Turkey, conveying a strong taste for the traditional

mythologies common to the ancient flourishing of Central Asian civilization, and its presence in perpetuity.

The bygone elements and distinctions of classical Iranian and Turkish identities, folklores, ecologies, wildlife and crafts reemerge out of time from the individual journeys of contemporary artists who continue to work in the lands that once housed the spirits of lost, pre-modern worlds. While extinct beliefs, languages and modes of being are all but forgotten, the intuition of steadfast creatives bent on giving shape and substance to enduring sources of mystery has an evocative, entrancing quality. The invisible and impalpable varieties of nature in which many of the figurative and non-representational works are set appear fished from deep within the collective psyche, especially in a comparative Persian-Turkish context as that which Jam curates for the world-weary public.

"*Metamorphosis* is something you can see everyday. It's about what pushes you to transform, and to experience a metamorphosis inside of you. Maybe your face is the same, but you feel like someone else, totally changed. *Metamorphosis* is often about a change in shape, but for me it's about something else, your mind, your feeling, your character," said Jam, surrounded by the antique ambiance of the Adahan cellar, accompanied by two assistants, including the embroiderer Damla Yalçın, who was slated to exhibit in the next edition, *Metamorphosis II*.

I am still human, but I might feel like a fish or a dog. The artist Reza Razm has a collection of twenty pieces and behind every piece is a couple, a relationship, someone sitting, drinking coffee. The body is human, but the faces are different animals. *Metamorphosis* is about how people are affected by society and the people in their lives, how they become another person.

Iranian contemporary art, generally speaking, has a number of illustrative signatures infused with powerful breaks from and alignments to tradition, as in the contrast between black and white shades, and the transparency of drawing in the composition. *Metamorphosis* delivers a monumental treasure trove of works by artists based in cities across Iran, from Tehran to Isfahan, Babol and Ghazvin, pivoted by multigenerational knowledge transmission. The master painter Ahmad Nasrollahi is featured with one of his students, Farhad Gavzan, who founded the nonprofit Drawing Museum last year, and who has, in turn, taught Hossein Tadi, whose drawings and writings have become key to the creative growth of millennial artists in Iran.

Zehra Ebrahimi is one of the youngest artists to exhibit in the first part of *Metamorphosis*, yet she does not show it. Her works have a conceptual maturity reminiscent in the mid-career oils of Fahrelnissa Zeid, a name synonymous with Turkish modernism. Her two mixed media canvases are titled, *Metamorphosis* (2017), spilling with a shock of patterns typical to the floral Iznik relief, coursing over the chestnut-hued flesh of women in various life stages. It provokes interpretations on the transcendence of Orientalist identity and reveals the impositions and internalizations of self-censoring that would impede holistic personal growth and greater appreciation for human and environmental diversity.

Ebrahimi is joined in generational solidarity with Nasim Malekpour, a child of the 1990s, whose mixed media canvas, *Untitled* (2017), has the fantasy edge of a dark, animation film, pockmarked with a visceral technique to gravitate the effect of a lunar craters against the texture of skin. The paintings of Reza Razm exude a related process, as he practically sculpts his oils with his palette knife for a gritty, multilayered effect that is anything but superficial. And against the worn, fragmented brick of the Adahan cellar, his geometric backdrops are all the more absorbing even to the most fickle eye.

Malkepour, despite her age, is a leader in the field where art and psychology intersect into mental health. As an art therapist, her work with children suffering from behavioral and psychiatric disorders is paralleled by another artist at *Metamorphosis* nearly twenty years her senior, Gökhan Deniz, an award-winning civil society activist and human rights practitioner who manages art workshops for prisoners and psychiatric patients.

*Distance* (2012), a mixed media work on stainless steel by Deniz, is an interactive piece that creates a symbiosis between the art and its audience. The portrait literally looks back at viewers with a pair of binoculars that gleam with the reflective medium, enticing passing thoughts on the nature of objectivity in interpersonal relations, and in an existential dialogue with art to prompt questions about the role of the self in terms of external perception.

The stark polarity of steel and the opaque black hue that fills the figure is akin to the narrow, vertical tapestries of pencil on paper by Farhad Gavzan, whose works explore the inner landscape of the psyche exhaustively, enough to recall the intricacy of the twentieth century European painter known simply as Johfra, specifically his late masterpiece, *Psychological Self-Portrait* (1996).

When the overworked salesman Gregor Samsa woke to realize that he was a human-sized insect, as Franz Kafka eternalized in his novella, *The Metamorphosis* (1915) he unearthed the psychological ruins of history. Ovid rewrote Greek mythology into a series of mortal dilemmas with his, *Metamorphoses*, published in the year eight of the common era. And in her vivid curations, Tima Jam is vitalizing the tradition of transformative psychology with her twin shows of visual art, *Metamorphosis*, I and II, to the sound of Adahan's cellar door.

November 8, 7:08 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Lily

Shakespeare's historical play, *King John*, published in 1623, is one of the Bard's least performed. It is set amid the groggy mists of the early thirteenth century, after the death of crusader Richard the Lionheart empties the throne of England for his youngest brother, John, to suffer the fate of a strongman, drowned in the egoism of royal power. France declares war over the inheritance. As a nobleman and peacemaker in his beloved English country, the Earl of Salisbury delivers the famed lines, "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily ... is wasteful and ridiculous to excess," defying King John, who by then has had himself crowned twice.

Across the Thames from Shakespeare's Globe, where *King John* premiered in 2015, as it recalls a time altogether remote from the usual production repertoire, past Big Ben and Buckingham Palace, is the Royal College of Art brushing up against Kensington Gardens, where its prestige is glorified as the only university in the world entirely dedicated to art and design for postgraduates.

Among the recent students were five women who completed their master's degrees in painting, all born after 1985, hailing from New Zealand, Turkey, the U.K., the U.S. and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It was arguably fate that led them to become friends, eventually to create, study and critique new work together in neighboring studios out of the Battersea Sackler Painting building. It was through art that they found solidarity as women.

With diverse aesthetic perspectives and varying approaches to technique and media, *Layover* energizes the collaborative spirit of the group show in Istanbul's core. Versus Art Space received the portfolios of Sarah Alagroobi, Rosa Allison, Emma Fineman, Vanya Horwath and Çağla Ulusoy, and flipping through the works, the gallery doors soon opened to forward admiration for the sprouts of genius, the daring intensity, the fun-loving prowess that each artist demonstrates with all of the youthful vitality of a generation enriched by constant, personalized and immediate multicultural interaction.

There are thirty-five artworks displayed, embodying two years of intimate creative exchanges, sharing both intellectual energy and technical skill, as the five friends charted a path forward into greater social realities by making art with the reciprocal effect of enlightening and broadening planetary, social consciousness.

Unlike the top-heavy, patriarchal delusions of grandeur, conveyed by the cantankerous King John of Shakespeare, the artists of *Layover* provoke the literary wisdom of his contesteer, Salisbury, as they represent a check behind the scene, and very much in the spotlight as a contrast to and also independent from the male-dominated vision of creative work, and yet done largely within a timeless tradition, by hand, with paint.

And even where Sarah Alagroobi employs computer technology to route plywood panels, she is still inspired by the oral storytelling of her Arabic-speaking grandmother. Yet, these artists equally affirm and transcend the dogmas of feminism and identity politics, maturing simply as makers on the path to redefining art and its appreciation for an increasingly diverse, global audience.

Reflecting on her days studying as one of the *Layover* quintet, Sarah Alagroobi remembers how her allies observed the imbalance of power, where representation in art was long riven by outmoded, domesticating mores. As a student committed to the twin ideals of artistic and professional freedom with her fellow women painters, Alagroobi felt that the "boys club" effect in mainstream art curation could be dismantled, despite the fact that it was rampant in one of the epicenters for art production and sale worldwide.

She is the only artist among the *Layover* five to have left London, having since returned to the UAE, where she is busy with upcoming shows. Her experience in London culminated in a mutual vision, to centralize women exclusively as an essential concept for group exhibitions of contemporary art. *Layover* is one ripe fruit from that harvest of intentional action, a quality uniquely imbued by the works of Alagroobi. In her two untitled series of routed plywood, nine discs and four panels from 2017, Versus Art Project curated her eye for calligraphic Arabic script, digitized from transcriptions that she prepared after interviewing her grandmother about the civil war in Syria. The software-fabricated pieces have a hybrid materialistic and virtual edge, relaying her training from furniture design to print media, and 3D installation among other practices. Obscuring and imaging where zones of abstraction and representation merge and differentiate; her sensibility speaks to the nature of gender fluidity in female expression, as to the indefinable blurs of multicultural integration, Middle Eastern nationalism, even human reason against the transcendent character of artwork.

"All of us, as multicultural female artists, collectively believe in the importance of representation as a vehicle for diversity and inclusivity. *Layover* refutes notions of cultural erasure in the contemporary art market and allows for women from eclectic cultural backgrounds to find common ground and an alternative narrative," wrote Alagroobi.

The works of Rosa Allison and Emma Fineman legitimize the female perspective. Çagla Ulusoy and Vanya Horwath break down the habitual tendency to dismiss the voices of empowered female artists. I have had great conversations with each woman, especially Vanya and Emma, that really progressed my work in a direction I never thought possible.

Entering under high ceilings, the loft-like gallery floor at Versus Art Project is upstairs in a historic apartment building behind Atlas Cinema in an enigmatic Istanbul alleyway. The oils of Emma Fineman are arguably the most striking at first, as she frames human figures within pieces that encompass mammoth scales.

Her frenetic, practically instantaneous attack against her canvases evokes a refreshing, vigorous passion for the sensation of attaining the concepts that range in her mind, only to pour out like the fleeting moment across swathes of empty space into delicious nodes of colored forms.

Her piece, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2018) details her investigation of self-image, as she explores herself in the guise of the opposite sex. Smearred letters and unfinished lines make for a dystopia of abstract expressionism. Another of her seven works at *Layover* is non-representational, yet addresses her age of puberty. It is titled, *Eleven Years To* (2018), and at four-hundred and eighty centimeters wide, it has its own wall.

"It was a pleasure to work with Versus Art Project. They gave us a lot of creative space that allowed our input. This is an ideal scenario that is sadly becoming a rarity. There is pressure in London to fit into a rigid commercial framework that discourages experimentation and changes your artistic habits. *Layover* allowed us to show works that are fresh and experimental. These opportunities are essential to progressing as an early career artist," Allison wrote.

From the beginning, a main idea in the show has been duality. This speaks to our experience of working as a group. Although we share the common language of painting, there are many aspects of our work that are opposite. My work is entirely handmade and highlights the imperfections and fragilities of the body. Sarah incorporates the perfect edge of technology.

With her oils and acrylics lathered onto variously sized boards, Allison often returns to a visual motif, that of the oval shape. Utilizing colored lines, and overlapping techniques, her work has a deep sense of motion, of gravity. *Falling Eggs* (2018), for example, is masterful in its subtle layering, its otherworldly mood. Distinctly, although with a similar eye for abstraction, Vanya Horwath expresses more down-to-earth reflections. *Mall Goth* (2018), created with an array of materials, namely acrylic, emulsion and PVA glue on canvas, juxtaposes the basic mold of a fashionable shoe, mirroring its contour in three duplicates. Her representational candor is marked with a vibrant, neon color scheme of faded lime greens and dark purple washed with indigo blue. Pale, handmade lines streak across - some disappearing - while others are a visible shock.

"The *Layover* show has been quite symbolic to me. Mainly because it is for the first time that I am showing in Turkey, my home country. Also, because it is for the first time since we graduated that we got back together in a show," wrote Ulusoy.

The work we are showing in *Layover* is a combination of what we have made in the past two years. A sort of research and meditation on the self, trying to explore and define a new, unique language, while we were at school. I find it interesting in that way since all these works were made under the same roof and communicated with each other through different periods. They are an archive and a result of what happened during the intensive two years of self-reflection.

November 15, 3:20 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Idle

For those whose work makes them comfortably numb to subsistence economics, privileged enough to thrive beyond the conventional round of material exchange, the end of the weekend often doubles as an existential crisis. Sunday is traditionally the first day of the week for those who read Genesis as a revelation of the origins of light. By international standards, Sunday is the last day of the week, and it generally feels like it, especially for worldly movers and shakers who associate letting go with giving up.

There is a Biblical saying, one long worn out by its usage as a moralizer, that "idle hands are the workshop of the devil." For the fourteen artists of *Sunday Morning*, the opposite is surely more true. Idleness has given birth to a trove of forty new works, most made within the year. The nagging sense that time is passing, that nothing really matters, that all of life is distilled to a moment when self and world meet and realize they are each other, that just about describes the Sunday vibe for those curious types who even subconsciously question the arbitrary nature of the seven-day week along with the imposed formalities of time and its measure, courtesy of both the real and symbolic Babylon.

"Ask, and it shall be given you," reads yet another passage wrangled from the kaleidoscopic smorgasbord of oft-quoted New Testament assertions. Its voice of confidence and unearthly diversions have served to remedy the unfocused indifference that tends to seep ever so slowly into the Sunday psyche, leading the majority of seculars to binge on shows of bittersweet, tragicomic wonder, to affirm what Turks might call *hüzün*, a melancholic hope, spiritual anguish, similar to quiet desperation the English way, cloudy with a chance of rain.

A mirror out of reach, reflecting nothing more than the wall above any conceivably organic human height conveys the ephemeral quality of a typical Sunday, one in which self-reflection is generally avoided at all costs. There is simply too much time, and the hands of the clock seem slower, leading to painful realizations of who and what might have changed in retrospect, what of life might have been passed while making other plans. That is why there are accountants, and priests. That is the gist behind, *Lover\_G1302*, a tongue-in-cheek installation of tempered glass, with a micro-layered polyester film frame crusted with liquid polymer resin by the artist duo :mentalKLINIK, combining the wiles of Yasemin Bandar and Birol Demir.

On the floor at the corner of the reception desk at Galerist is a puzzling manifestation of aesthetic, environmental consciousness in the form of an off-white painted wooden box. Trickster and creator Saara Untracht-Oakner sketched domestic, potted plants on its surface with a thick black marker. From the sides, the leaves are broad, stems tall. From above, the soil is visible. She communicates the sense of having created something from nothing, like the cosmic giggle heard from the void of a dawning Sunday, an unavoidable period of total disillusionment from whatever workaday logic may have ensued during the week. And she makes the space homey, as to walk into animated scenes from Sunday cartoons for children. Delightfully, her



work spans the exhibition space in variable dimensions, appearing subtly as outlets installed neatly against the walls at ankle-height, the Victor mouse trap, *kilim* rugs.

In the innermost room, snaking through hallways and doorways, soft natural lighting is tempered and blued by the windows looking out over the Golden Horn from the hilltop district of Tepebaşı in historic Pera, adding to the daytime aura that is *Sunday Morning* at its most acquiescent, where every last hint of protest fizzles against the stark, nihilistic reality of a day intended for nothing, to resist action itself, to forego work, to be reduced to the commonplace and let bygones be. As the Beat writer Jack Kerouac wrote in his 1960 treatise, *The Scripture of Golden Eternity* inspired by sacred Buddhist texts, "Everything's alright, cats sleep."

In quirky, comic form, Untracht-Oakner waxes prolific through the spacious voice of her blank-slate medium, prompting a neo-minimalist fantasy of readymade coffee table and desk furniture, outdoor facades and well-lined bookshelves, accoutrements of the living room malaise that makes for the familiar setting of a Sunday morning, when everything normal seems slightly out of reach, almost unreal and undeniably made up. Each contrivance of daily life is exposed as a transparent artifice, mere bleak leftovers of the impractical aspirations that the week past drove to sheer disappointment, to listless sentiments, jaded apathies.

With a similar mind for satirizing worldly concern, Untracht-Oakner sketches a fictive *National Geographic*, dated current to November 2018, and placed atop the couch table in her domestic daydream. Imaginably riffing on climate change and fake news, she headlines the cover story: "Scientists Are Asking: Is Earth Even Real?" In the adjacent room, :mentalKLINIK returns with a series titled, "Some-Time," manipulating *Time* magazine covers with holographic stickers for tykes, though to the effect of teasing the mainstream American narrative with playful touches that almost look seamless, conceivably the result of a design emergency in the face of extreme banality, the ultimate apolitical resignation.

"Lately I've been pretty obsessed with the news and the state of the world and politics. I think a lot of us have. It's tiring. I wanted to organize a show that just simply wasn't about any of that, at least obviously," wrote O'Rourke, reflecting on her curation from New York.

I wanted to SEE a show that wasn't about that, too. *Sunday Morning* is an exhibition that subversively circles around the elephant in the room, let's say. It's meant to remind us that art doesn't have to be strictly about anything -- it can be personal.

The multi-roomed, circular exhibition space at Galerist offered O'Rourke an ideal setting for her curatorial philosophy. She dodged the tendency to impose an experience of the artworks. They are open to reinterpretation; spatially, temporally, and conceptually democratic. She posits a stream-of-consciousness style uniquely generous to her audience, facilitating limitless contextualizations of narrative and perspective within the curated interior, defined in the case of *Sunday Morning* by the architectural variety of introductory entrances into Galerist.

"There's a level of self-preservation for me in every work. Lara Ogel's video, *What (else) grows in the dark*, is a Sunday morning come-down, an eerie video of pieced-together found clips about mushrooms and mushroom picking and categorization. The images and music recall the pleasure and pain of a Saturday night spent out late. Mushrooms, like night owls, do not need energy from the sun," wrote O'Rourke.

:mentalKLINIK's works reflect the attitude of a Sunday morning -- the idea that it can be anything dependent on the whos, wheres, and whens. The uncanny quality of their works, and the inability to qualify their practice as having any one particular aesthetic or material form is balanced by their ever-present attention to quotidian politics and social mores.

Presently in New York as founding director of the Ballon Rouge Collective, for which she is preparing Kathy Battista's curation of Carmen Argote's show, *Warm is a Black* in East Harlem, O'Rourke sees *Sunday Morning* as universally adaptable, with its colorful irony, its sense of humor which speaks to the prevailing contemporary style, less seen in Turkey than elsewhere. For her, the title concept of *Sunday Morning* is a reference to home, though not as a mere idea entirely divorced from place. While she experiences Sunday morning differently in her childhood home in New York as compared with her self-made home in Istanbul, there is an enduring nostalgia, renewal and rejuvenation that transcends geography and memory, perhaps instilled by what the British biologist Rupert Sheldrake termed "morphic resonance," patterns of time that sway events and behavior, a phenomenon that could explain the specific emotional quality that always mysteriously returns during the early, idle hours on Sundays.

"I was nervous putting up this show. I purposefully and intentionally went for the lighthearted which was a scarier and more daunting task than a show with a serious or weighty subject matter," wrote O'Rourke, who respects Galerist as one of the most important contemporary galleries in Turkey now in the cultural moment in terms of its artist representation and how significantly they participate in international fairs.

It's more personally revealing, and easier to criticize because I don't have some hard to understand philosophical concept to protect me. This show is a bit like stand-up comedy. It's personal, it's meandering, it's insightful when it's great, and it's a relief. And, it's difficult to pull off.

November 22, 10:51 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Sand

A gray rain falls lightly over the subdued colors of the municipal building. Its neatly crisscrossing square motif, a kind of outdoor linoleum, entices walkers across a gated courtyard toward its entrance. Pale seagulls screech overhead, almost disappearing into the misting overcast cloud cover that drips relentlessly as it floats past.

The beige, block concrete facade at the entrance has seen its day, waterlogged and soiled with runoff. The slate-hued lettering identifying the building as government-owned and as a center for culture and community seems to have leached its colorant. The traditional, Islamic architectural feature called the *muqarnas* is built over the entrance, an inverted geometrical complex of pyramid shapes, surrounded by labyrinthine dimensions of black mirror windows and wooden-like panels reminiscent of office desks.

Men in suits that vary in shades of blue stand outside the automatic door to exhale and phone-gaze. A pair of them return back inside the building, where they stand under signage for an exhibition hall named after *Rumeli*, recalling the Balkan region of olive lands once extended European Turkey to the Ionian Sea.

Atop the stone staircase leading inside there is ample advertisement for the current exhibition of contemporary Arab art, courtesy of Üsküdar, a metropolitan region synonymous with a traditional song, "While going to Üsküdar" (*Üsküdar'a gider iken*). The melody was first heard in the U.S. as the klezmer arrangement, *Der Terk in America*. In the Arab world, it is played to the title, *Oh Girls of Alexandria*. Incidentally, the lyrics begin with its first line complaining about the rain. Some might interpret it romantically.

The show extends across two halls, from the Rumeli to the Anatolian room. It is billed as an exhibition of paintings, but there are also thirteen sculptors, two ceramicists and an installation by Rachida Amara of Tunis. Her material drives onlookers from the public – and also the occasional building employee – to reflect on the discomfiting presence of military life as an immediate, concrete influence from the very earliest instant of rising to daily consciousness. Flattened, army-issued, camouflaged sleeping bags lie open across the hard, reflective flooring in the Rumeli space. Each is accompanied by an alarm clock with hands reading different times. All sense of an individual, human presence is absent, rivaled by the structural centralization of a mechanized artifice. And they are juxtaposed with a firm touch, albeit simple and thoughtful.

Amara is one of four women at the exhibition. Despite the gender imbalance, the curation centered these women at the heart of the show. In the largest of the exhibition halls, Rumeli, the large-scale piece by Dhuha Alkatib of Iraq, is a mixed technique work of gloomy abstract expressionism stained onto a plush canvas two hundred and eighty centimeters tall. It is displayed at the core of the room against a dedicated wall, standing over the installation by Amara, both exuding a dystopia of historic atrocities, dehumanized psychological landscapes of an embattled mental interior set in unnatural netherworlds inhospitable to life, growth, beauty.

"The artist should continue to research the laws of nature, which I consider as the main reference for each artist in general, and for me in particular, in the search for new sophisticated techniques, and the development of intellectual understanding through communication. I like and respect all artists and their works. I do not compare myself with any of them. Every artist has his own feelings and a special intellectual perception. The most important thing is that the artist is honest with his work," wrote the Iraqi sculptor Atika al-Khazraji from Baghdad.

The sculpture exhibited by Khazraji is an expression of sheer verticality. Her animate forms metamorphose from arboreal to avian to celestial. Her studied grasp of sharp lines erected with bronze showcases a refined ability to convey concept. She asserts that she was born to sculpt and has remained faithful to raw materials like stone, wood, metals and natural plant fibers. As a child, she first molded soap and sculpted the faces of her close family, spending nights fascinated by the phenomena of space, wrapped in the prehistoric, riverine arms of the Fertile Crescent, where stargazers had contemplated the nature of being since time immemorial before the dawning of civilization.

"I love birds, with their beauty, the smoothness of their bodies. They are intelligent creatures with their laws. Every person I meet reminds me of a kind of bird. In addition to being a symbol of freedom, the bird in this work symbolizes political and social constraints while connected to land. The trees and thorns indicate suffering in spite of these restrictions, to reach the summit embodied by the planet Saturn," wrote Khazraji, explaining the more searing dynamics of her aesthetically arresting work, with its chained bird-like body, cut thorny stumps, and a heavenly body out of reach.

I used bronze in my work to show hardness and cruelty.

The district of Bağlarbaşı in Üsküdar has that classic multiethnic Ottoman mix of Jews, Armenians and Greeks, as is observable by its distinct cemeteries, as well as the number of minority schools and churches still in use. And it is not uncommon to pass a house with antique wooden facades carved so intricately as to summon astonishment. The municipal airs of the Bağlarbaşı Community Center exude a monolithic social atmosphere, one aligned with a resurgence of core Turkish traditions.

Streams of schoolchildren sweep past the exhibition halls on weekday afternoons to attend assemblies led by the booming harangues of well-amplified speakers who thunderously affirm the value of education. In the wake of such exclamatory power, there is a clear cultural affinity to reclaim the values of Ottoman society, by that meaning a pluralist social identity in Turkey as formed in solidarity with former subjects of the Ottoman dynasty. The ideological climate encompasses a nominal acceptance of the people from its bygone imperial territories, specifically inhabiting lands now defined by modern Arab nationalism. In which case, it is significant, with respect to the prevailing milieu in Istanbul, to recognize the greater context to the celebration of contemporary Arab culture at the center of Turkish officialdom.

"Personally, my concept is based on the 'Human Ordeal' and the impact of the public. There, the human being transforms into another being that is unfamiliar. My painting is an attempt to find a special composition style that moves the viewer. When I am painting, there is a space full of beings that I recall to recompose them. When I finish my own work, it becomes the people's ownership," wrote Iraqi painter Balasem Mohammed from Baghdad, reflecting on his more than forty years of painting.

In Baghdad, I can say that a change occurred among generations of artists as to vision and style. The pioneer generation established the so-called 'Al-Baghdadiyat.' Their styles were mostly derived from Iraqi settings.

A closer look into the contemporary art of Arab visionaries at the Bağlarbaşı exhibition reveals a nuanced expression, an introspective dimension that threads seamless, eastward trends once fundamental at the height of Ottoman achievement. As was popularized by late twentieth century Western liberalism, when the East was synonymous with soul-searching, Iraqi art could be understood to adhere to certain principles, beginning with a variety of nativism, steeped in the myths of Mesopotamia, later the calligraphy of the Quran, before political ideologies and modernist movements galvanized late developments in the nation's art narrative. The greatest proportion of works presented by Kelimat Gallery for the show are from Iraq due to close collaboration with Azameel, a collective of Iraqi artists, many of them sculptors, formed under a name that means "chisel" in Arabic.

"Our generation is called 'The Eighties Generation.' We were raised with wars for more than thirty years. I lived with three wars. Our generation is saturated with death and destruction. After the American occupation of Iraq, this generation was affected by the supposed openness to contemporary arts. This generation hasn't discovered its own way yet," wrote Mohammed, whose abstractions have a soft, watercolor-like texture.

Art needs luxury, while here people are engaged with living problems. There is no culture of buying artworks. Galleries vanished, although they were so many during the 1970s. Kelimat Gallery can contribute to the worldwide circulation of Arab artworks. That is most important.

November 29, 7:26 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Machine

The projection shutters. Another pair of photographs appear, spliced side by side. Where a food shop specializing in foreign stock absent of all human presence ends, a lone man begins, fitting himself into a simple black leather shoe on the ground, surrounded by factory-issued merchandise off the sales floor. The old man wears a light grey, rounded, flat cap, something a shepherd might wear for shelter from the sun on a mountainous plain. He looks straight into the lens of the camera, flanked by shoes of all kinds. Rubber wellingtons stand in a neat row, while floral-printed slip-ons are stacked messily about heaps of bagged product, lined in boxes.

The effect, over countless varieties of twin shots photographed by Candida Höfer from 1972-1979, pictures the seamless visual continuity innate to Turks, in Turkey and in Germany. In her characteristically minimalist approach to titling her series throughout her very widely acclaimed career, Höfer presented these works as, *Turks in Turkey* and *Turks in Germany*. Yet, despite her professional reach as a solo artist at such institutions as the Louvre, and in group exhibitions at MoMA, Guggenheim and many others of enviable prestige, the Dirimart exhibition *Times, Places and Spaces* is the first time in some forty years that her early photographs have come to Turkey solely under her name, finally returned in top form to the country, culture and people whose faces and bodies, livelihoods and neighborhoods remain foundational to her creative life.

Twelve gelatin silver prints, sepia-toned, monochrome photographs line the spare, whitewashed walls at the Nişantaşı gallery, accompanying the ongoing, silent succession of projections. The prints are exclusively from her *Turks in Germany* series. There are certain dynamics at play that are apparent from both the human subjects of her photographs and her framing, particularly when her interiors are devoid of people. In all but one of her pieces with human presence, her camera is met with eyes that stare back, some candidly, others directly poised.

Behind the scene, it is clear that, even in Germany, her series on Turks speak not only to the photograph in the frame, but also to the context of her shooting, where she is plainly an outsider. A picnic of four men and three children are affixed to her lens as she eternalizes them for *Volksgarten Köln III* (1974). Relatively unamused, they are not smiling as they sit hunched, looking back uncomfortably, as to wonder why they are the object of such fascination.

The curation of her twelve gelatin silver prints in Nişantaşı has the uncanny sense of distance closing in, an effect that comes with her outsider perspective as a phenomenon itself approaching her subjects with increasingly personal, intimate exchanges, before finally occupying the spaces in which they live and work. The series progresses as she advances toward the Turkish immigrant. *Volksgarten Köln II* (1974) is taken from at least a good twenty or more paces away, as she sets her photographic gaze on a quartet of covered ladies picnicking under a thick tree so tall that only its gnarly trunk is visible. One of the ladies seems in good spirits, though holding her arm awkwardly, looking at the camera with a faint smile. The others are merely perplexed.

What follows is the result of communication. A family portrait, *Volksgarten Köln I* (1974), is of laughter and joy amid a beautiful day outside, for Germans and Turks to meet, in Germany. And then she takes a step back with *Rudolfplatz Köln I* (1975), entering male space at the mercy of not a few glares in a smoke-stained game room. The plaid suits, twisted mustaches and greased hair of the '70s jumps from the silvery surface of her vintage still.

In one of her earliest, purely interior photographs, eschewing the portrayal of people, titled *Handelstrasse Köln* (1975), Höfer captures the kitsch, ancient wallpaper of the day, onto which embroidered velvet murals glorifying the nostalgic, mosque-peaked cityscape of old Istanbul are tacked, yet only the ghostly visage of Atatürk rises in the sky like a full moon waxing the Turkish flag's crescent to fulfillment. From that conceptual departure, her works convey a literal abstraction from portraiture and documentation, towards a reflection of indoor space internalized by the artfulness of her meticulous framing.

*Keupstrasse Köln III* (1979), as a late example in Nişantaşı evokes her maturity, not only in her photographic theory, but also of using her medium as a record of a specific time and place. She snapped a butcher shop, a cultural fixture for Turks anywhere, but the butcher is not present and neither are any customers. Though likely an interpretative stretch, the emptiness communicates postwar Germany's role in relationship to history and national space and to the global migrant crisis, considering the persistent legacy of Nazism, which continues to threaten the existence of minorities in Europe and abroad.

In the proceeding era of her creative momentum, after much of the arc of her career had rounded its lofty orbit between the years 2009 and 2017, she immersed herself in interior photography with one of the keenest eyes in her field, honed after decades of practice by her unique approaches to technical precision as a maker of fine images. To prepare for her exhibition at Dirimart, the artist was present. The result is a reflection of mirrors, an exhibition of her photography curated like a space within one of her photographs. The design of the warehouse gallery in Dolapdere transformed. A visitor has the expansive feeling of walking into one of her images, and that, it turns out, is exactly her intent.

"My work on Turkish workers in Germany made me aware of the environment in which people live and how they form it and how they are formed by it. This exhibition, I think, shows the circle very well: Interest in change led me to the series on Turkish people, the importance of space and the built environment led me to public and semi-public spaces, and the forms and colors that make up this environment led me to the abstract series," Höfer wrote over email.

Höfer studied under the conceptual, photographic artist duo Bernd and Hilla Becher at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. She was a classmate with others who share her degree of notoriety, like Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Axel Hütte and Thomas Ruff. They would help each other with technical issues. By then, she had already begun work on her *Turks in Germany* series. She describes the Bechers as atypical teachers. She remembers how they instructed with a non-directive style, emphasizing the environment, despite the subject.

Her interiors were shot in such opulent locales as the Neues Museum Berlin, Palacio del Congreso Nacional in Buenos Aires, Villa Massimo Roma, La Bibliothèque de l'INHA in Paris and the Catherine Palace Pushkin in St. Petersburg, among other vibrant pearls of world architectural accomplishment. In her hands, they unfold as from the hard shell of an oyster into a distillation of unearthly form. The colors alone are enough to demand awe. Yet, her manner of composition is equally mystifying, as she summons something of an immortal symmetry, like a Tibetan *tangka*, an Egyptian pyramid. She opens visual doorways through which viewers may experience the profound harmony of the eternal, sacred geometries, in architectural tradition and its worldwide flourishing.

She works simply. For her Turkish series, she used a hand camera. And for the interiors, she employed a digital back atop her camera. As for light, she assumes what is available, whether it is natural or artificial. A ceiling lamp is fair game. She does not prepare installations. When she began in the 1970s, she started photographing by hand, and then later moved to larger cameras. But recently, she has returned to her hand camera. In a small, dedicated room in the back of Dolapdere, her series of abstract photographs is inspired by Istanbul. Again, she roamed about its streets. Through her lens, a crumbling, Ottoman fountain takes its place in the history of abstract photography. The overcast skies of the city and a multicolored glass-paned doorway become absorbed in the visualization of human expression freed from the objectifying and overexploited sense of sight.

For all of her groundbreaking conceptual artistry and high institutional affiliation, both in her creative process and in her professional networks, she shies away from questioning whether photography is, as a matter of fact, art. "Photography looks like art, but art has to have some kind of depth," said Turkey's preeminent twentieth century photographer, the late Ara Güler who passed away in October, during an interview with the *New York Times* in 1997. "Photography," Höfer wrote in response, "is just the best, and I am afraid only, way for me to make images."

December 6, 7:22 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Out

Twenty-four hours before *Introvert* surfaced for an opening to remember, the interior of Pg Art Gallery looked like the earthquake expected to devastate Istanbul any year now had already struck, or that a wrecking ball from one of the countless construction projects in the city's core had missed a dilapidated Ottoman-era structure and crashed into the exhibition floor. In the winding, cobblestone hills of Çukurcuma, a neighborhood known for its many and migratory dealers in antiques and art, Mehmet Sinan Kuran and Pırıl Güleşçi Arıkonmaz argued in the furnished basement of the gallery that she had named after her initials twenty-five years ago.

Kuran was then in the middle of cramming the contents of his personal studio into her place of business. By the variety of sundry effects that streamed in relentlessly, the show could well have been called, Hoarder. One drawing two-hundred and seventy centimeters wide, the size of her largest cellar wall, had to be fit through the back door, a feat Kuran orchestrated wearing a soft felt hat the shape of a cooked turkey while lunching on a plate of *köfte*. Yet, despite the seeming unpreparedness of the veterans down below, upstairs in the main display hall, a crew of young artists worked diligently, unfazed by the warning hands of the clock.

Among them, the multitalented painter, sculptor and tattoo artist Recep Serbest was fitted in knee braces, his swollen hands soiled with the inner workings of the most immediate matters demanding his attention, as well as that of his peers who collaborated with Kuran to produce an ingenious reanimation of the art show concept for *Introvert*.

For the Saturday night opening, hundreds of Istanbul's art lovers braved the rain to see what they had heard would be a conglomeration of sights unlike they had ever seen before. Behind the opaque veils blanketing the storefront windows at Pg Art Gallery, a singular ambiance marked by the signature aesthetics of Kuran and Arıkonmaz merged to convey a year's worth of efforts by ten artists and Bizon Studio led by Kuran. They are each of them and together skilled practitioners of a stunningly diverse range of disciplines, having crafted objects painstakingly authentic to the sweeping, mind-numbing visions that Kuran sketches, which are, for *Introvert*, materialized through numerous mediums: epoxy, wood, embroidery, glass, oil, ink, acrylic and paper. Since mixed and matched, the joint curatorial eye offered a set design of an exhibition that could very well be considered as the stage backdrop for a surrealist reboot of Neverland. And there is a woman at the sweet heart of Kuran's visual narrative.

Throughout most of the bewilderingly intricate visual topography of Kuran's illustrative sketch work, made vibrant with his electric color schemes and a quirky, running style defined by contiguous, stream-of-consciousness contours, a woman appears, in many guises, often with a pseudo-religious air reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. In fact, one of his portraits conceived with Recep Serbest, affixed with an ornamental, fabric cross, is titled, *Virgin Mary* (2018), an oil painting on wood. They added a gilded Latin inscription haloed above the exquisitely drawn face, reading from a lime green book that radiates above an amphibious world of underwater vegetation and otherworldly creatures of all kinds of unusual shapes and colors.

In a masterwork of fiber art, including embroidery, applique, and beads on silk, Tuba Geçgel, twenty-five years of age, teamed up with Kuran to produce the piece, *A Magical Forest* (2018) over a six-month period. In it, the lady resurfaces, robed in white, standing with one arm raised like a pre-Christian goddess, seeing out of a lidless third eye above concentric circles. Each sacred hoop is a state of being, a station of the soul, revolving around a burning heart. Her presence, like a recurring dream, evokes majesty from such dense overgrowths of fine artistry.

In more domestic garb, with calmer poise, the mystery lady stares back warmly from another tapestry, *Mini-Lobster* (2018), handmade by Geçgel with gold thread, specially imported beads from Japan, gorgeously soft silk and other prime materials. The piece is enclosed by a box of smooth, clean wood framing a glass case decorated with floral drawings by Recep Serbest, an accomplished icon painter himself known to depict animal subjects. *Lobster* (2018) is the centerpiece, suspended above the entrance floor at Pg Art Gallery as a collaboration between Kuran and Burak Ayazoğlu, who has been called the epoxy artist for his knowledge and abilities with the all-pliable synthetic substance.

The artists of the show agree that within the 3D-printed, four-hundred and twenty centimeters-long, jumbo *Lobster*, Ayazoğlu rendered the best known sculpture of Salvador Dali's actual face. Undressed in the glazed ceramic work, *Snow White* (2018), the enigmatic lady stands exposed with eyes endearingly closed, encompassed by a ring of outlined piano keys, a motif common in Kuran's oeuvre.

As a visionary artist in the tradition of Hieronymus Bosch at home in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1515), he is intoxicated by his beloved where the late Peruvian painter Pablo Amaringo would have chosen ayahuasca. Kuran throws lightning bolts of blissful madness before his open-eyed seers. He went next-level seraphic with Recep Serbest for the epoxied oil paintings on wood, *Untainted Love* and *Tainted Love* (2018), which recall the lofty angelic beings that float down from Hagia Sophia to greet world wanderers and reincarnate pilgrims.

Like a millennial jazz performer transcribing a legendary improvisation from the previous generation of greats, Recep Serbest produced another oil painting on wood, framed elaborately with a gothic tinge, after Kuran's piece of waterproof ink on paper, *Sad Sister* (in Turkish, *Hüzünlü abla*, 2018). Together, they echo the harmonies of devotion to an art form symbolically iconized by divine love for a woman. Unlike certain interpretations that would identify the extreme asceticism in Orthodox Christianity and its painting for a stream of religious minimalism akin to the music of Arvo Part, Kuran instills a more personal touch that is just as complex as much of the historical canon in the approaches to painting that he recalls like a mad monk binging on mystical union with the muse.

Finally, his direct visual quote of Leonardo da Vinci's 1490 painting, *Lady with an ermine* for his eponymously titled work with Recep Serbest has all of the provocations of eternal genius, where the contemporary artist duo challenges not only the ultimate test of the creative to do the

impossible just once, but to parallel such human proximity to perfection in visual form. There is an absorbing power to the image of a woman who exacted da Vinci's conceivably limitless mental capacity. And more than five hundred years later, she continues to enthrall two postmodern men, an elder artist and his protégé, with her only visible, well-built hand firmly pressed against the white coat of an ermine, that curious member of the weasel family whose fur adorned ceremonial garments in the high courts of Europe.

"The worst thing about this century is that everyone is trying to do something by themselves. I believe in collectives, collaborations, and wholeness in terms of human psychology. Everyone wants power, money, and ambition. I love all humans. We must learn collective life because the world has big troubles, with climate change, species extinction," said Kuran, enjoying the fruits of his fourth solo show despite never having attended art school, yet as a lifelong drawer with stacks of sketch journals and now an older self-made artist, he mentored younger artists for *Introvert*, whose names are generally unknown to gallerists and collectors.

"*Introvert*, the word, signifies a rich inner life, but I'm a social monkey. I love young people. They have very rich minds. My generation has lost its curiosity. Younger generations have less, and value little money," said Kuran, who began collaborating on *Introvert* after Recep Serbest gave him a tattoo in Kadıköy. "*Introvert* affirms collaboration. I'm spiritual. I hate polarization in politics or relationships. I embrace all."

During a solo show by Kuran at Pg in the recent past, he occupied an entire wall, six meters wide, every day for over thirty days in front of crowds performing a public communion within one impromptu, shared drawing. *Introvert* transformed Pg to yet another degree, replacing its bare floors with turf under dim lights reflecting off the ebony enclosure that has been greened, wooded and cultivated with the sprouts of a high mind joined to its roots, to the youth who will blossom and one day take over the air, monopolize the sunlight, and flower into a beauty returning like the woman in his visions, as a perennial in spring after winter's vanishing.

December 14, 1:37 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Gravity

Shafts of soft, natural light beam in through frosted glass windows. Floating dust particles are visible, wafting in the still, indoor air. The sun-rays warm the fresh wood panes and floorboards upstairs in the historic apartment renovated into the multistory gallery, performance hall and artist residency, Halka Sanat. It is one of the few remaining examples of early twentieth century architecture in Kadıköy, a fast-growing, pro-youth neighborhood that once housed significant Christian minority communities of Istanbul's proud Greek and Armenian heritages.

The frayed edges of an intricately woven, geometrically-patterned textile mark the floor with its ruddy earth hues, lain beside a pair of rustic, silver earrings. The transcendent tenor of the craft objects and autumnal spectra permeate the domestic ambiance with a universal, feminine presence, as that made by a woman in a room of her own, assuming the poise of a Saharan folk goddess. Piles of coarse sand collect in the corners of the room, conveying an exotic, desert ambiance. The simplicity of the space cultivates the peace of solitude. It is a place imbued with the mystic riddle of an unseen mirror wherefrom works of art appear to the world-weary who wander inside enough to reflect, tempted by a new, collaborative poetics expanding diverse forms, techniques, and ideas.

In the last days of November, 2016, a poem emerged from Şirin Tufan. It spoke of itself, and written in English, it now serves as the centerpiece of *Poem as the Gravity Pull*. An octet of artists envisioned its lines, its whole and the physics of its magnetism through a number of mixed media works. Most pieces hang on the wall at eye level in a single room, featuring the classic bay window of the traditional Ottoman home. Not unified by outward aesthetics but by an internalized faith to the spirit of Tufan's literary muse, the some seventeen works are directly inspired by the authenticity of her compulsion to poesy, which is said to have struck her like a divine intervention. Certain artists adapted her personal revelation to the letter, while others visualized her symbolist words more abstractly.

An anthropomorphism of nature looks out of the corner of its eye in a visionary landscape by Emrah Danacı, a canvas colored with a seasonal mood, its wintry sky washed in an astral spectrum reminiscent of an aurora borealis, streaked with indigo blues and pale flares grounded by the flowering stalks of a verdant meadow. "I see faces / Rigid, cold," wrote Tufan, poeticizing her experience with aural visitation. It seems a dream had come to her awake, and that in the mists of her suspicion, she stared back into the sounds of her mind, her language transformed into a subtle personality, by the subconscious whims of her intuition.

"I see pictures of persons," began Tufan, leading her poem like a confident seer. The artist Doğu Çankaya responded with a series of four watercolors. They are nebulous emanations of humanoid bodies with liquid contours, striped with the textures of used paper, furrowed and blotted with ink bled through its fibers. Faded scrawls of quasi-calligraphic figures hover around the "persons," recalling the experimental practice of the post-literate, linguistic imagery called asemic writing. A painting by Hülya Küpçüoğlu is streaked with the runoff of droplets fallen

from a flock of winged beasts black as night. The backdrop is lathered in dissonant, polychromatic layers, radiating a soiled effect, muddying the sense of subjective perception in the style of a psychedelic dystopia. "Drawing signs with / Disillusioned feathers. / Where have you gone / All mighty soul of mine," wrote Tufan.

The vintage photographer Tomas Hetmanek contributed two elegant pieces resurrecting the early film development technology of the nineteenth century. He outlines his enigmatic, female models with collodion, a syrupy mixture of alcohol and ether once used to coat glass photographic plates. With slighted gazes, they surface, as beautiful as they are silent, immersed in an otherworldly veil of obscurity. They are creatures of the darkroom, embraced by a murkiness as pure as a glistening new moon sky. Laid bare, the contemporary physiques shown in his photographs eternalize human existence in continuity with the archaic past. "Lost in the pages of abandoned books / I see faces," wrote Tufan. "You betraying I / All nude and dark."

The intimate, fleshly theme of Hetmanek's interpretation of the poem is advanced and unhinged by Lale Altunel, whose round, sculptural relief encircles a levitating whirlpool of people whose bodies defy gravity as they wing about, assuming flamboyant poses against each other so as to suggest a prehistoric rite of collective harmony, of uninhibited animalistic urges expressed in a shared state of blissful freedom. By the looks on the faces of her various and untamed depictions, meticulously detailed with its sprawling musculatures, every facial inflection from the transpersonal mass exudes a cathartic ecstasy, as to breathe underwater swimming, to fly weightless ad infinitum, to allow gravity to slacken, and all the more so under the enlightening sway of a poem wrested from the reaches of a genuine heart. "Poisoned by the lies of Eros / All painted in stainless colors," Tufan wrote, ending her verses with an embittered, unrequited allusion to the polytheistic and polyamorous Greek god of pagan love.

The current resident artist at Halka Sanat is the polymath intellectual Slobodan Dan Paich, a gentle, older man who is exhibiting two of his works for *Poem as the Gravity Pull*. He sat in the ground floor of Halka in his element, preparing for the performance, *Washed Ashore: New Stories, With and Without Words*, displayed inside the compact arts complex in Moda, out of a room that would seem more like an unfinished basement than a theater seating for twenty, if it weren't for its curious assortment of props. The show featured a distinct cast of storytellers, musicians, dancers, and artists under a concept grandfathered by Paich, who is often seated comfortably before his writing desk and drawing board, wearing a tasteful white beard, and smiling generously with the mien of a quiet sage enamored with life and the surprises it lays bare at the feet of all dutiful, creative workers.

"I go to many academic conferences. I was looking for a place. One year I came to Istanbul, and I said, 'Yes, this is the place.' My English ex-wife found Halka. I had never applied to art residencies because my art is odd. It's not contemporary. It's not traditional. I exhibit but usually art residences are very trendy. If you're not quoting Foucault and have an out-of-focus video they usually don't know what to do with you," said Paich, originally a Yugoslav exile of the Tito regime, since pursuing four careers as a cultural historian, fine artist, theater director and former

professor of architecture at UC Berkeley. He has happily collaborated with Halka Sanat for eight years, arriving confidently to the fringes of Istanbul's art scene bearing gifts of talent and enterprise after having founded and directed the Artship Initiative in San Francisco. "I initiate and curate exhibitions at Halka. As a theater director I have developed a process for over forty years."

The two artworks by Paich at the gallery are characterized by a minimalistic levity. In one, a sable forest scene is contrasted by a single tree, bent and wavering under an invisible gust. The etched white lines of its branches detach from the trunk, and drift away, dissipating, increasingly separated, flung into disarray before a total, lightless maw. Secondly, a jade-tinted head of hair adorns a human face. Its sketch is cracked like a mosaic, pieced together as it were by the coherence of creation's innate, albeit imperfect order.

Paich often spends his daytime hours like a neighborhood regular at Tribu cafe in Moda's vibrant core, where he employs quirky art tool inventions all his own, such as his specially conceived pens filled with a homemade recipe of tea and ink. He draws with a naive sincerity, an unabashed innocence in contradistinction to the highbrow complexities of his reputation as an international academician.

"I'm not anxious. I'm not ambitious. It just comes from life. It's not an artistic construct. I don't have a studio. I do my drawings with tea and ink in cafes," he said, seated with a buoyant smile in front of a traditional Balkan tunic worn by his grandfather at his wedding over a hundred years ago.

It's not perfect. It's a *dede* [grandfather, in Turkish] job, an experienced person's job to sense that there is something there worth exploring. Tufan went through personal hell and she wrote. It comes from not being a poet. It comes from poetic imagination, the way of language, a way out. She had to write it.

December 20, 6:23 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Savage

Following in the footsteps of two naturalist missionaries from Reims, the writer and curator Nicolas Bourriaud walked into the one-hundred-forty-eight-year-old campus of the Saint-Joseph French Private School in Istanbul and spoke about the importance of ecological awareness. While not hailing from the nineteenth century's Romantic tradition inspired by philosophical and spiritual retreats into the heart of nature in search of humanistic values, Bourriaud, instead, led a professional troupe of art lovers through the labyrinthine hallways of the Natural Science Center, founded in 1910 by Frere Possesseur Jean and Frere Paramount-Felix, now coordinated by Ahmet Birsel, formerly director of the World Wildlife Fund's Marine Program in Turkey.

The indoor exhibition grounds at the Natural Science Center convey the country's finest, taxidermic work to educate future generations about the importance and urgency of environmental conservation. Among over thirty thousand animal and forty thousand plant species, and nearly five thousand minerals and fossils, the collection is mostly comprised of endangered or extinct specimens from the bio-diverse ecology encompassing four seas and extending from the fields of Thrace to the Mesopotamian reaches of the Anatolian interior. It was a welcome preface to the announcement of The Seventh Continent, the title of the 16th Istanbul Biennial. Bourriaud invoked the central theme by first screening a clip from the Pier Paolo Pasolini film, *The Hawks and the Sparrows* (1966).

In the vintage movie, an elegant older man named Toto sports a cane and hat as he walks with his son Ninetto down a rustic, unpaved road in the Italian countryside. On route, they meet a crow sympathetic to Marxist rhetoric. Ideologies are further anthropomorphized when the duo travel back in time seven hundred and fifty years, reappearing as monks out to convert a flutter of sparrows. Pasolini directs his comic actors with flippant mockery of the church and its absurdist impositions against nature, that of humanity and of all creation. Frere Possesseur Jean and Frere Paramount-Felix may have seemed as out of place, like the dancing, whistling monks of Pasolini's cinema when they took to preserving samples of the flora and fauna around the Saint-Joseph schoolyard, which is near to some of the oldest, Neolithic remains of human settlement in Istanbul's metropolitan region a short walk from the Asian coasts of the Sea of Marmara.

"Ecology is among the most crucial topics of our time and issues such as climate change, global warming and pollution need to be taken into consideration urgently, in the global sense. We believe that art has a direct influence on all developments in the world. Therefore, we think that the Biennial will be an important platform to bring up these sensitive issues," Bige Örer wrote as Contemporary Art Projects Director at the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, which, since 1987, organizes the Istanbul Biennial as the most comprehensive international art exhibition in Turkey and its region.

The Seventh Continent is named after the 3.4 square kilometers of floating plastic weighing seven million tons, forming an archipelago of three islands in the Pacific Ocean. (In Europe, schools teach that there are six continents, combining the landmass of Eurasia). Bourriaud is

curating the 16th Istanbul Biennial as a means to explore the artificial territory, as an anthropologist would study interactions within a community of humans, animals, objects and machines, venturing into what he is calling an "off-centered world." He posits a revisionist interpretation of anthropology as a form of participatory dialogue requiring immersion into another civilization, citing the British anthropologist Tim Ingold's phrase that "anthropology is philosophy with the people in."

Similarly, in the field of contemporary art, criticism and history merge with the practice of artists and writers who are conscious of the symbiotic reciprocities between what they make, how the work is shown, and its effects, both articulated and unexpressed by the individuals and collectives exposed to it, either personally, or with its public response. In 1975, the American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth published his essay, "The Artist as Anthropologist," in which he suggests that artists are engaged in materiality beyond mere intellectual inquiry, exposing the enigmas of scientific objectivity to manifest reflexive investigations of the cultures and environments in which they live.

To paraphrase the Goethe epigraph that Kosuth used to introduce his classic discourse printed in the first edition of *The Fox*, a short-lived magazine that shaped conceptual art theory, that to understand fact as theory is wisdom. It is an apt statement to contextualize the thought of peopled philosophy as anthropology, which, in turn, is contemporary art by another name. In the 1990s, the American art critic Hal Foster advanced the theoretical lines of Kosuth with his seminal text, "The Artist as Ethnographer?" where he further internalizes the concept of the artist as an agent of change informing social activism and cultural perception, positioning art as a vehicle for subjective transformation. Bourriaud curates artwork in response to critical writing, focalizing the next generation towards what he terms a "coral art," and a "polyphony of voices."

To identify contemporary art as a kind of anthropology is to transcend object-based inquiry and figurative representationalism towards truly conceptual creativity, as that proposed by Kosuth and his peers, like Sarah Charlesworth. It is to see art-making and its presence in public space not as an arrangement of objects, but as a dialogue between subjects. Bourriaud adapts the stance of Ingold to relay his notion that anthropology in the Anthropocene includes non-human elements. And more, in his view, contemporary artists are inventing a new anthropology, which he is designating as "molecular."

Finally, nature and culture are mere synonyms in a fully anthropomorphized reality, whether exemplified by the thriving of non-native species in a residential landscape, or the Apple logo marking the world soul's collective subconscious with the mythical, tempting fruit picked and bitten off the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"We could define molecular anthropology by saying that it's the study of all human effects, all human tracks, all human prints in the universe, and their interaction with non-humans. It's a very expanded version of anthropology. This will be the guiding thread throughout the exhibition. Today there is a more general awareness that this classical division between nature on one side



and culture on the other side, which has sustained Western philosophy and thought for more than 2,000 years, has come to an end. It has become completely obsolete," said Bourriaud at Saint-Joseph.

This awareness of the end of the division between nature and culture has generated new dialogues between cultures, new historical narratives as well as a new distribution of our ways of thinking, more precisely, new ways to write our history.

As part of his approach to dismantling and laying bare the foundations of Western intellectual tradition, Bourriaud spoke to the role of young contemporary artists whose "molecular anthropology" recycles the narrative continuum of human history as a long return from ancient literacy to the postmodern embrace of orality. He proclaimed as much with the mature cognizance of life in the Anthropocene attesting to non-human linguistic information in nature and machines as a twenty-first century natural scientist preparing for an excursion into the eye of *The Seventh Continent*. In contrast to the outmoded anthropocentrism of early science, Bourriaud draws inspiration from the Claude Levi-Strauss, who foresaw the fate of all scientific discipline as a method "not to constitute, but to dissolve man," as he wrote in the final chapter of his 1961 book, *The Savage Mind*.

"Art could be described as an anthropological practice embracing alternative communities, minorities and even the individual as a species by himself or herself, to quote Levi-Strauss," said Bourriaud, who leaked little about the biennial, disclosing only that the main venue will feature a maze, and that, as a whole, the exhibitions will provide the intellectual and aesthetic tools to understand global problems.

What if every artist would be the last survivor of a society that has disappeared. That would be an anthropology where every artist would be the savage of every beholder, savage being the name given by Western colonizers for the people with a different culture, a different vision of the world. I suggest that we recuperate this word in a positive way. Savage, then, would become the name of the other in general. Every one of you and me, we are all savages, one to another.

December 27, 7:15 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

**2019**

## Lost

Outside on the street, the tramway runs along the wide, pedestrian İstiklal Avenue, bustling with the sale of treats and trinkets. Hawkers shout in Arabic, luring youngsters with globetrotting families in tow for an ice cream cone, irresistible even in the dead of winter, especially when playfully purveyed by smiling men in embroidered vests and fezzes, clothing styles a century outdated. As soft snowflakes fall in slow-motion under the Thracian sunlight, cold rays bounce off the neoclassical facades of bygone Greek residences and European establishments, glorified by semi-indoor hallways named after historic Ottoman territories and adapted from the ancient architectural form of the stoa, with its gilded marble since renovated to a luster.

The proudest commercial drag in the city where East and West meet appears eternally peopled to the brim, all the more so in recent years as waves of Arab-speaking migrants, including some half a million Syrian refugees, have called Istanbul home, often before confronting harsh realities behind the promises of universal humanity and economic stability in northwestern Europe. The multi-center business complex inside the Mısır Apartment building stands ornate on the relatively calmer passage along İstiklal (in Turkish, independence) between the fifteenth century Galatasaray High School and the medieval Genoese port of Galata.

The building's exotic title, "Mısır," is from the Turkish word for Egypt and the Arabic for garrison, denoting occupation in the land of the Pharaohs by settlers from the Arabian peninsula. There are two separate rooms on the second and third floors inside the converted apartment building where Zilberman Gallery houses relatively modest gallery spaces to exhibit contemporary art. It is a charming, fashionable cultural institution in Istanbul's core, which under the direction of founder Moiz Zilberman for ten years and running now also encompasses a sister annex in Berlin.

The art on view in its chambers has that characteristic, moody indoor lighting that both sterilizes and transforms the still air into a place meant to plumb the depths of creative inquiry, led by minds perpetually tasked to shift the paradigms of individual identity, intellectual work, and innovative creation, manifesting new concepts of being and perception for footsore audiences prepped for change in an increasingly internationalized world of boundaries that fluctuate between obstructive fixation and total dissolution.

In general, it is the case that the specialized worlds of contemporary art, particularly the realm of indoor, neighborhood gallery exhibitions, are one of the last frontiers of unabashedly public, process-based work, mostly conceived by educated specialists and lifelong practitioners of certain hands-on methods to investigate the nature and efficacy of communicable, independent productivity in the interest of cultivating provocative, opposition-informed thought.

These interpersonal values and modes of civil society are paramount in a capitalist-driven, nationalist-ordered world, where popular growth is defined by the consumption of ready-made artifacts manufactured by a decreasingly human, cultural engineering.

Exile begins like an abstraction, its roots supplanted, by definition, into a conceptual reality defined by loss, towards an ideal, levitating as it were, sustained by involuntarily unsettling. Antonio Cosentino, whose signature, flat-stemmed cactus marks his *Untitled* (2017) charcoal on paper, alludes to a common motif in, *An Exile On Earth*, with his focus on a loaded vehicle.

A ghoulish cartoon of a skeletal, human figure reaches out from the trunk, encumbered by the cluttering cargo. With his subtle, crafty touch, Cosentino drew an ambiguous type of automobile. It is not clear where the front is, or the back, or if it is even oriented to a grounded, binary sense of geographical direction. Beside the simple sketch, his mixed media, *Map* (2017) outlines a fictitious wall constructed west of the archaic city of Constantine, placing the current, geopolitical moment as comparable to a level of development that was common in antiquity.

The series that follows is by Zeynep Kayan, also a Turkish artist whose works seem to comment indirectly, more theoretically, on themes that become life or death for the compatriots of the artists whose works are curated at the heart of the exhibition. Halbouni, for example, created in solidarity with the plight of his fellow war-torn Syrian nationals with his *Nowhere is Home* (2015-2017) and *Monument* (2017) series.

And ultimately, Hiwa K returns to the endangering migration path and extinguished urban memories of his Kurdish Iraqi origin story with his gripping pair of videos, *Pre-Image (Blind As The Mother Tongue)* (2017), and *A View from Above* (2017). In a cleverly framed sequence of eighteen stills from her series, *Studies for staying in the middle, or changing quickly from one state to another* (2018), Kayan visualizes the existence of physical dividers as a system of opposites open to wholesale reinterpretation.

A barrier that would block a person from view, and from movement, is not an absolute, Kayan might argue, but one of many proofs suggesting the innate malleability of material and the ability to sense and reinforce, or redefine, its reality. Her video, titled after the same series as her photographic work, animates her convictions in the way of a performance. The face of a lone person is unseen, unframed. The body demonstrates, on behalf of all, the contours of human enclosure, it being a function of perspective. The gallery then broadens into a spacious succession of invitations into the makings of multimedia objects and acts of installation based on the primacy of the ideas that conceived them. While created for distinction, the artworks are not in the least divorced from worldly concern. They might even prompt its redirection.

The first edition, fine art prints of snapshots from the *Monument* series by Halbouni are as glaring as they are imaginative, refreshing as they are avant-garde. Any device to encapsulate his effect is doomed to disappoint, as words fail to convey the presence of coach buses turned upright before the architectural splendors of the Maxim Gorki Theater and Kunsthaus Dresden in Germany. The installation and its impressions as prints give literal, material weight to the many overarching speculations that have emerged following the EU migrant crisis.

With its front end pointing to the heavens, the buses might symbolize the idyllic stargazing of migrant dreams, to ascend north, become mobile, economically, to stand tall as human beings, strong, visible.

Where automotive technology is seen as a source of German national pride, to baldly display bus mechanics in the context of migration in iconic public spaces in Germany is to stress that by bringing such technology to the greater world, it is no wonder if people abroad use it to how they will, seeking to wield such power at its source. *Monument* could be seen as a metaphor for the outstanding, repercussions of European colonization and the latest generations of post-imperialist hegemony that continue to strain Western Europe, as former subjects of its empires, and equally victims of its foreign conflicts, reiterate the timeworn saying: all roads lead to Rome, now to Berlin, Paris, or London.

The emotional pulse of *An Exile On Earth* is narrated by Hiwa K, whose videos are deeply moving. *Pre-Image (Blind As The Mother Tongue)* is written with powerful originality and personable frankness in a voice-over monologue. "Feet are never based," says K, emphasizing the fundamental necessity of movement as essential to the human experience.

The artist balances a pole stretching upward with an eccentric web of mirrors, as he walks through nameless terrain overland from Mesopotamia, through Turkey, to Kavala, in northeastern Greece, and down through Athens and the tent cities of Piraeus, into a vague rendering of Italy, observed askew as from the weary, survivalist eyes of a migrant come from the far-flung, embattled reaches of the Middle East, as K had from Iraq's Kurdish region.

"*Pre-Image* is indeed a central piece for me, I even wanted the artist's voice / sound / narration to be diffused in the entire space to invite / call the audience, and accompany the audience, throughout the exhibition space," wrote Çelenk Bafra, who enjoyed the challenge of working within the Zilberman Gallery space in Istanbul as her smallest curation yet, since she mostly collaborates with museums and biennials.

I don't think the exhibition is about the migration crisis. It's rather about being an artist and living as an artist in a world with constant mobility and migration.

January 10, 4:10 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Factory

A wind tunnel accelerated between the towering Quasar skyscrapers in Istanbul's congested Mecidiyeköy district, as light rain pelted against exposed skin among the huddled, cold masses who overflowed off the sidewalks like the water table under the colonnade of a raised freeway. Traffic raged. Millions rushed. Marble stone stairs led up through a vertical concourse of aching heights, picturesque for its raw, geometrical symmetry but less than beautiful for its demonstration of sheer, technical power. The corporate spires flew in the face of all that is grounded, personal, human.

By the slick, rainswept, double highway, and in the outdoor court of towers seemingly shaped by the divine intervention of a Tetris game played by Zeus, the surname of one of the city's proudest gallerists, Pilevneli, appeared on pedestrian signage, marking the way to an alternative reality conceived out of the thin, high air by practitioners of contemporary art. Its door gives way to blank terminals where tried methods of madness have devised soft engineering techniques for the mind to traverse transcendent worlds within the worlds of sense and reason, expanding consciousness with the freedom of a lucid dream.

In such a wombs of collective potential, the creation of knowledge becomes visible, palpable, and audible. Transformations of color and whiteness, form and emptiness, sound and silence come to life through direct expressions of human ingenuity and personality. The exterior of the Mecidiyeköy complex is unassuming, deceiving even, as a leafless tree stands at its door opposite a columned chimney of ancient brick, shading patches of manicured grass under the overcast, sunless dim of midwinter in the thick of a bone-numbing humid spell engulfing the global urban center with the atmospheric pressure of its two seas.

Once inside, warmed by the light of *Human Reflection* by Arik Levy, eyes are flooded with a FractalLED installation of countless light strips networked to fifty units, strung up to effect a circular dimensionality, enwrapping those who approach in a luminous experience much like a deer would freeze motionless before a pair of headlights. In the case of Levy's aesthetically-charged invention, the oncoming vehicle is a mere apparition of conceptual space.

Under its visual sway, an individual's nervous system flutters like the wings of a moth before a dancing flame, reflecting the nature of incorporeal enlightenment at its essence, centered by an unlit exposure. But unlike moths, people are less inclined to its dark core, as to stand beneath its interlaced, radiant disk is to be drowned under waves of metaphysical awe.

At the back of a hallway corner immediately across from the access door into the Factory, a work by Tony Matelli, from his Lapses series, titled *Weed #443* (2018), is affixed at the right angle where the floor meets the wall. By first impressions, its appearance is in perfect contrast to the gleaming mechanics installed by Levy.

The piece, a painted bronze model of a plant, is chilling as a symbol of post-industrial desperation at the end of nature. The sliver of natural growth that it would represent to an unknowing eye emerges from its lifeless, barren concrete surroundings, enclosing its realistic yellow petals in a measureless vacuum of the spaceless void.

Around the corner, the current exhibition of over a hundred artworks starts to snake through the nondescript weave of rooms that recently opened to the public, with the airy scent of construction dust newly settled. Thin black strips of fiber are fastened tightly to block passage into dead ends, sometimes at the foot of Escher-like staircases that lead nowhere.

There are many architectural question marks at the Factory, such as windowless rooms which have since become shrouded in the enigmas of Pilevneli's renovation, now purposed entirely to show contemporary art. The gallery admits everyone freely, at no cost to the public, so that all might join in fishing out the obscurities of the collective imagination from every nook and cranny of the post-modern building. What was once a Factory has turned into a kind of tool shed of visual ideas capable of revising human purpose.

*Bosphorus* (2018) by Refik Anadol is a digital optical illusion, curated as a trio of editions to exhibit his eight-minute video. His utilization of custom software to create moving data sculptures works wonders against two ambient sound channels. Viewers are engorged with the simulation of liquid phenomena, as the virtual, watery surface rolls to a boil, and then crashes in on itself successively like a churning sea. Its pixelated rectangles emulate H<sub>2</sub>O molecules as transfigured into a whirlpool of epic proportions at one of the last Factory gallery halls furthest within its bowels, where the video is projected against a massive wall.

As people stand silhouetted before its gushing tide of artificial currents, they resemble Odysseus facing the mythical Charybdis of Homeric tradition, that wormhole of life-threatening passage over the Mediterranean Sea, an ecology continuously fraught with humanity's confrontation with itself and with nature, considering that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported 2,200 crossings in the first sixteen days of 2019.

And coincidentally, shown next to where *Bosphorus* initially bubbles up from the deep is the twelve-minute video, *I Saved My Belly Dancer* (2015) by Youssef Nabil, a Cairo-born Egyptian artist based in New York. Within an enclosure of opaque curtains, his piece is on repeat, recurring like the daydream of an Arab migrant from North Africa, a live action character played by Tahar Rahim. He is flat on his side, washed ashore on a fictitious coast where apparitions of his cultural past come to life.

Unmoving, equipped with flags of the green crescent, and dressed to the nines in the gender-binary fashions of the Ottoman military and its multinational society, his people stand before him, encompassing Arabic life from Mesopotamia to the Maghreb. When the costumed troupe fall into the sand, Salma Hayek walks onscreen in the role of a belly dancer, smearing his unaffected body with the warmth of her passion.

Nabil satirizes conventional depictions of Eastern and Western peoples when his video concludes with Rahim in cowboy clothes riding through the deserts of the American southwest, accompanied by Hayek, his belly dancer, on the back of his saddle. The striking juxtaposition of popular archetypes conjures a counterintuitive balance of images, commenting on the irreversible experience of assimilation, and its unique effects on men and women. The piece is ultimately foreboding, visualizing migration as a fantastical, amnesiac embodiment of the other.

The magical realism in the sculptures of Hans Op de Beeck and the flagrant, textural abstractionism in the paintings of Erdoğan Zümrütoğlu are on either end of the ideological spectrum in dialogue with themes addressed by Nabil. At the Factory, they are situated beside each other, divided by a fabrication of a life-size elephant dangling from the ceiling, sculpted by Daniel Firman out of polyester resin, flexible polyurethane resin, fiberglass, steel and fabric, titled *Loxodonta* (2017). The elephant hangs in the room, symbolizing certain blaring points of social ignorance. Recognition of unforgivable oversight, for example, to grant refugee status and international rights to asylum seekers in Turkey, would admit an unforgivable reality.

Beeck, on the one hand, with his meticulous portrayals of natural forms, human and vegetal, evokes the eternity of the moment, and the strength of fundamental presence, that, when the fleeting moment is paused, every figment of being holds lasting, mystical fascination. On the other hand, Zümrütoğlu breaks open the seams of representation with a liberal madness, dousing his palette of trans-personal expression with an evasive, feral purity, impossible to catch, beyond immortality, relaying truths greater than social norms and acculturation stereotypes. Under his elephant, a triad of bronze sculptures by Firman cuts the human body into a clever arrangement of theoretical amputations, accenting the innate disorder of individuals in relation to themselves despite sociocultural influence, negotiating the contradiction of separate wholeness.

At the Factory, the current artworks displayed reflect individual practices, whose motifs converge and counteract with world-class curatorial insight. Pilevneli is extending its reach in Mecidiyeköy by prompting residents of Istanbul, and its passersby, into an inspired realm of conceptual speculation and artistic invention, to walk, like Şener Özmen in his video, *The Distance* (2014) over a critical space where each footstep, even over the sands of eastern Turkey, echoes with the names of artists.

January 18, 2:01 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Domination

A red curtain drapes from the clean, off-white archway, over the floor onto a wash of pale, baby blue. Its streaks of flowing strokes are mopped by a barefoot Anatolian wrestler, who enacted a custodial performance art to color code the interior of The Pill with an atmospheric azure, reminiscent of a newborn boy's sparkling new bedroom, as seen from the cradled, blurry eyes of the infant himself.

The double curtained, ruby-hued entranceway waved warmly during the casually discreet though well-attended, mid-January reception at The Pill, a relatively new gallery in the contemporary Istanbul art scene distinctive for bringing Francophone artists from North Africa and Paris in dialogue with the Turkish worldview at its most active, creative source in the ancient imperial capital.

Where a medieval chain once secured the breadth of the Grecian inlet known as *Haliç* in Turkish, meaning estuary or sound, The Pill is situated along a busy multilane thoroughfare, somewhat inconspicuous surrounded by old Phanariot taverns and an ever-expanding archipelago of new cafes in one of Istanbul's most rapidly gentrifying historic districts. Behind its sheen of opaque white, its storefront and sign blend with its neighboring urban industrialism.

Soufiane Ababri stood inside, confidently poised to meet his muse, as human figures walked within his frame aplenty. He fielded impromptu conversation, delighting in the colorful mix of locals and seers who sauntered in to bask in the world of his imagination. The Pill was transformed through his inner eyes, with hints and graces both subtle and overt.

Smatterings of handwritten lyrics, bookended with eighth notes, were graffitied across the wall with a loose hand, something out of the secret fort of a preadolescent, given to such charm. The words are by none other than Howard Ashman and Tim Rice, who wrote to the music of Alan Menken for the classic Disney film, *Aladdin*. In a twist of logic as confounding as the animation's unreality itself, Ababri conceived of his show after learning that forty-one percent of Trump's voters agreed to bomb Agrabah, the imaginary land of Aladdin.

If there are any, the future survivors of modern history will study with eternal fascination how by the end of the second decade in the twenty-first century, the people least knowledgeable of the world had become the most powerful. But these theoretical students in times to come might discover that these Americans, like the dinosaurs, were also utterly incompetent before earthly evolution, to the extent that they had confused the fictions of preschool cartoons with the militarization of foreign policy.

There are conspiracies in circulation that dash the innocence of Aladdin, pointing to suggestive subliminal messages that directors Ron Clements and John Musker deny. But as a new, live-action version of the beloved 1992 film is on its way in 2019, the speculation is renewed. The juxtaposition of purity with obscenity might simply bind and balance a yearning, provoking the

collective subconscious to the point of manifesting fantasy. It is that tension of vulnerability and fancy that Ababri spotlights with vivid lucidity in his works.

He intentionally uses colored pencils generally marketed for kids, and his figures, deceptively basic, are gorgeously naive. He is a master of proportion and its dissonance in the best tradition of post-Cubist expressionism. Spread across a neat iconostasis of frames somehow eerily similar to the one down the street at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, his most recent series conveys a delirious pantomime of observational humor.

Ababri is an outsider in Turkey, yet, as a millennial artist born in Rabat, Morocco, his eye is set deeply into the weary sockets of his subjects. He intuits the regional airs of Anatolian men. As the show comments particularly on the male world, its brute, animating power and the blaring contours of its becoming, Ababri places himself into his work with pervasive omnipotence. When the academic Cüneyt Çakırlar wrote an essay on the art practice of Ababri, he considered his subjectivity in the context of liberation and citizenship as modes of social and personal power designed and enforced principally by men.

Ababri identifies as an immigrant, a brown-skinned member of the post-colonial generation of Moroccans at work in France. In certain ways, bygone conflicts do not end but are transformed by peacetime methods of exchange and interaction between peoples who remain divided by groupthink concepts based on the innate, involuntary diversities of human biology, communal localization and cultural development.

In defiance of martial discipline, Ababri is reputed for what could be understood as his French New Wave sentiments. Like the anti-hero of Godard's famous, genre-defining 1960 film, *Breathless*, he stakes his claim to fame within the malleable frame of a mattress. In the comfort of a soft, interior room of his own, he produces what he brazenly terms, "bedworks." Çakırlar explains: "The bed becomes the studio."

Identity implies the other, as all opposites do. As much as Ababri is aware of his peculiar, physical and conceptual self, so he pores over exaggerations of exoticism, reversing the Orientalist lens toward the characteristic embodiments of Western stereotypes. In not a few of his sketches, roughly outlined though gentle at the core as the posture of masculinity in contrast with its emotional center, he emphasizes light skin. One drawing pictures a multiethnic family, with a paternal type wrapping his arms of pink flesh around the necks of two children whose complexions represent markedly darker pigments.

There is, in the pairing of spectrums, a figurative symbolization of what Çakırlar calls "diasporic double consciousness." An interpretation of the phrase would lead to apt reflections on the nature of immigration and assimilation as the transition from empires to nations has invariably demanded a social dialectic of race relations, which essentially means that nationalism's success is due in no small part to those on the margins of civilization's progress, and that Western

modernization, in practice, could never have happened without the immediate and encompassing presence of former colonial subjects.

Ababri and his work reminds the international public and its global citizenry that the stories of darker pasts are still being told and that its tellers are coming to light not only to speak for themselves but to envision an inclusive order of worldly existence in which all stripes of people are seen, as integral to the jigsaw puzzle of humankind. A recurring aspect in the show, *Memories of a solitary cruise* is that of replicas of the arched and curtained entranceway in a strict outline of nontransparent blue paint. In front of these portals of color, bouquets flower out of the torso of sculptures depicting thighs in wrestling shorts. It could be that the likeness of a new man has yet to blossom to fullness, but it is sprouting with the vibrancy of life's beauty.

"What I am trying to understand with my work, and as my projects progress is the role of violence in the history of forms and the position of minorities within this so-called history of art," said Ababri, during the making of his past exhibition, *Here is a Strange and Bitter Crop* at SPACE studios in London, in which his late fall show dressed the gallery in a style akin to the interior design at The Pill.

How those systems of social domination come to infiltrate and contaminate systems of representation and the economy of work. It is the idea of how to have a political and engaged practice without using the vocabulary of the dominant power. I constantly review and manage the work in order to build a story and a position against the system that surrounds me.

In the same way that Americans descended of African slaves and indigenous peoples reclaim the words that once derogated them to inferiority, Ababri critiques his place in traditional Eurocentric society to see differently and defiantly, to draw aware of his alternative perspective. He is inspired by the common habit of snapping smartphone photos. But he does it with a sideways glance, stealing, as he says, the attitudes of appeal that men exude in public, at work, and in otherwise complete privacy.

"For the past five years, I have mainly been working with drawing. In fact, it was a conscious decision to stop what I was doing before, a sort of radical break with what I had learned in art school and in the normative and stereotypical French educational system where drawing has no important place and is often marginalized and is considered as a lower art form or something preliminary," he said, echoing the greater complexes of societal prejudice.

January 31, 7:11 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Child

Minerva, the Roman equivalent of Athena, is the virgin goddess of poetry, medicine, wisdom and strategic warfare, though it is said that she was more a patron of the arts to the Romans than the top-down warmonger of the Athenians. Her smiling marble bust looks up above a polished mantle upheld by the Rod of Asclepius, as to protect and heal entrants into the historic Minerva Han in Karaköy, tempting passersby to admire the antique elegance of Levantine Istanbul.

The divine qualities of Minerva are a welcome metaphor for the building as it temporarily houses the works of three international artists: Ferhat Özgür of Turkey, Knutte Wester of Sweden, and Dejan Kaludjerovic of Serbia and Austria. Into the subterranean floor beneath a spacious reception hall, a staircase leads under the French for "strong safe." It is a vintage vault straight out of early twentieth century international finance culture along the Avenue of Banks. Inside, a sequence of three, decreasingly lit exhibits opens with an installation by Özgür.

A construction scaffold is draped with a canvas showing a series of photos. Özgür traveled to the eastern Anatolian province of Diyarbakır to cast a candid light on the conditions in which children play. The centerpiece obstructs the way to the next hall, delaying short attention spans from moving on before contemplating the array of readymade symbolism.

M. Kıvanç Gökmen, a young independent curator and artist, worked at The Pill as the associate director at its quirky location in Balat, uniquely bringing Francophone artists like Apolonia Sokol and Raphael Barontini to Istanbul, where German and English art worlds have more visibility. Gökmen met Özgür as his professor of contemporary art issues and art criticism at Yeditepe University before the two became fast friends and now collaborators.

A year ago, Gökmen transferred to Düzce University where Özgür taught as a professor in the painting department. Özgür wore the hat of mentor with a cool demeanor as he navigated the rapid currents of emerging names and movements in Turkey's cultural milieu in dialogue with the global art world.

One day at class in Düzce, Özgür lectured on the video animations, drawings and sculptures of Knutte Wester and Dejan Kaludjerovic, the former with whom he was in a group together show in Göteborg Konsthall and the latter who he knew personally after participating with him in an artist residency in North Ossetia, an autonomous republic of Russia in the Caucasus. In his seat and inspired, Gökmen began to strategize, thinking as a curator.

Little did Özgür know that he was sowing the seeds for a future exhibition, *Another Day*, *Another Life*, in which he would show his brand new work, *Nowhere Land*, alongside a multimedia presentation by Wester, all under the designs of Gökmen. In the span of three years, his teachings bore fruit.

"According to the given concept, I tried to convert the space into something depressive, where there's no way out. Indirectly, all of the objects here have symbolic meaning, but not directly," said Özgür, as his voice echoed in the underground chamber beside his multivalent installation.

Özgür first acquired permission from local authorities in Diyarbakır as he held his camera and walked amid the rubble of devastated, skeletal town infrastructure, documenting a number of overburdened upheavals. He visualized the scenes with an eye for ground-level innocence. Many alleyways were blocked by tall, formidably thick concrete barricades. Only one of his photos grouped onto the canvas actually depicts children, four little ruffians bearing sticks and stones on the border of a rock pile, the rest implying an absence, of childhood, of play, of life.

"The scaffolding represents the ongoing gentrification process, and [the canvas of photos] a shroud, laid over the scaffolding, to cover up the ongoing chaos. The documentary photographs focus on childhood memories, and how they survive. I saw that they tried to make the most of their own childhood, unaware of state pressures," said Özgür, who speaks with the authentic, sustained cadence of a seasoned scholar. He utilized two of the wall surfaces on opposite sides of the scaffolding to contextualize his installation, enveloping it in a tight seal of found objects and materials that trigger relevant meanings.

He built a blockade of his own, though using decommissioned wooden ballot boxes, as a metaphor for the "crisis of democracy", a concept that decries political democracy as ineffective, maladaptive and even harmful to most people around the world, especially those residing within and between the borders of failed states. He explained how, in 2011, the Turkish government exchanged what they saw as the old-fashioned wood of ballot boxes with transparent materials, so as to relay a message of transparency.

Özgür used both old and new ballot box materials to create a wall and photo installation, where archival images are overlain with see-through plastic. One of them is from 1973, depicting boys exercising during the now-defunct National Youth Festival Celebration, which Atatürk started. On the other side of the wall, he smeared concrete, and placed a single obsolete ballot box below it, mixing and matching the visual elements of control.

He stood between walls that would imaginably tell more tales than he if they could talk. They are now continuously revitalized by the efforts of Sabancı University, which founded Kasa Gallery in 1999.

A story is unfolding a few steps inward, to the second hall. Its narrative, and voices are akin to the significance behind the celluloid snippets and artificial structures assembled by Özgür, only it penetrates to the heart of the matter more immediately, like a cold knife. Wester is a multidisciplinary new media artist who employs his handcrafted skill as a draughtsman for the twenty-first century. Inspired by his grandmother's childhood, he made a fifty-eight-minute animation documentary titled, *A Bastard Child* (2016).

In the minds of Turkish nationals, Sweden seems an idyllic place on the map of humanitarian achievement worldwide, with its economic egalitarianism, charitable outreach and liberal immigration. Wester unravels its more complex origins. His grandmother, born in 1909 out of wedlock in Sweden, knew the harsh realities of orphanages and prejudice that made single mothers into prostitutes and delegitimized the existence of fatherless children. At one point in the heart-wrenching, utterly beautiful film, the strong, wounded mother takes her daughter by the hand and decides to drown herself with her child, but she cannot break the midwinter ice.

*A Bastard Child* questions the notion of legitimacy in the European tradition of thought and culture that was established by racist and sexist orders based on inheritance and nationality. Within the round of current events, the film is insightful as a comment on migration issues in Europe, as they ensue unabated with the wholesale effect of reinforcing and abolishing both right and left definitions of nationalism. The sense of belonging is crucial to human groups. When children, as newcomers, come into the world into a bounded society and do not fall into socially contracted and determinable identities, they threaten the status quo. In response, extreme conservatives might target anyone, including honest-to-goodness freethinkers.

The last room is completely dark. A projection flickers. Its ticking recalls another age, decades ago, before the ruthless atrocities of the twentieth century had spilled into the present. *Another Day, Another Life* sinks into the eeriest depths of the prepubescent subconscious with the photographic installation, *The First of May, 1977* by Dejan Kaludjerovic. It forwards a deep sense of foreboding before the genocidal breakup of Yugoslavia, pictured in the microcosm of a violent incident during a playdate. A deadpan voice-over recounts the tale: "She remembers the boy and the girl teasing each other and fighting."

"For my first exhibition as an independent curator, I wanted to start with childhood. First, it is something easy. But, on the other hand, it is something really hard and dangerous. I really wanted to avoid agitating with this exhibition. I didn't want to try to show how children feel, or how they suffer. I wanted to ask to myself first: What am I doing with art?" said Gökmen, standing next to Özgür at Kasa Gallery, emphasizing that he could never have done the show without him.

At some point, art represents a way of communication. Or is it a catharsis?

February 9, 4:37 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Embroider

To thread a needle through fabric, hooped by a band of wood, is an act charged with metaphors of relationship, both organic and personal, drawing its makers and admirers into the inner worlds of memory and imagination. It is a practice recalling traditional methods honed throughout history to appreciate the value of salable fabrics and textiles by interweaving familiar visual embellishments, enticing would-be buyers with irresistible seductions. Its rich floral harmonies have bedecked the ensembles of both the moneyed and working classes throughout the medieval to the pre-modern eras from London to Tokyo.

In the centuries of Ottoman rule, embroidery was a distinguished craft, and remains an iconic symbol shared by the many ethnicities of its multinational culture. While mostly resurrected for foreign affections, and preserved by an increasingly powerful social milieu who line the streets of Istanbul's old city donned in flamboyant clothing styles once popular in the bygone days of less audiovisual stimulation, embroidery has also assumed new adaptations of form and technique. Its skills have been taken up by the youngest generation of Turkish women, who are using its subtle craft to make social statements, and fine art.

Among them is the hardworking Damla Yalçın, who, by her early twenties, already appeared in multiple group exhibitions. She could be seen, among many places, with the curator Tima Jam in the cellar gallery of Adahan, steadfastly embroidering her next piece while surrounded by a conglomeration of Turkish and Iranian artworks during the “Metamorphosis” curation series, in which she showed her works alongside Laleh Memar Ardestani and Melis Buyruk. She draped a canvas to fill the contours of an interior brick archway, embroidered with the likeness of a shy girl with only the outline of a face.

Inside the chic lobby of Le Meridien in the upland district of Etiler about midway along the Bosphorus on Istanbul's sloping European banks, Krank Art Gallery exhibited her nostalgic minimalism. The works are deceptively simple, like a child, who, staring blankly at a stranger, is internally riveted by a kaleidoscope of emotions and thoughts, criticisms and reflections. She uses layering and light to effect a range of perceptions, enlightening her welcome seers with an entrancing invitation to accompany her back to her earliest recollections, at home, napping, playing, dressed for the mere occasion of her adorable presence.

Yalçın has a naive touch, yet is a refined practitioner of reductionist philosophy in the guise of material artistry. In fact, before delving into the exposition of her works, she almost immediately referenced Gaston Bachelard, whose book *The Poetics of Space* inspired her to conceive her self-portrait in the family house of her past and its environs through the silent voice of her chosen medium. His meditation, published in 1957, is an architectural treatise dedicated to lived experience with an advocacy to build human places based on the principles of nature, and to understand just how to do that through the metaphysical devices of poetry and literature.

When someone walks through the corporate glass of the hotel lobby and into the poetic space of the compact gallery at Krank, motion sensors flick on soft lights to illuminate the backcloth of her seventeen circular-framed works hung up on the sentimental wallpaper. From a safe distance beyond the field of the sensors, her portrait sits and stands alone, like she had embroidered for her piece at Adahan. In the vicinity of the backlighting, furniture, and rooms come into focus. For the sleekly-designed pages of the show's catalog, the publisher used transparent paper to evoke a similar effect.

In one of her pieces, she hops onto a cushioned chair in a comfy sitting room encircled by pillows and plants. And raising her arms to keep her balance, she allows the layers of her embroidered day dress to float in the photographic air. Above her belt, the lines of thread depicting the embroidery on her childhood dress mirror a central metaphor in art history. By re-embroidering the embroidery on the clothes she has since outgrown, and also by transforming family photographs into personalized visions of her handiwork, her delicate pictures of lost time come to symbolize an intergenerational break with tradition, from the hobbyist manufacture of domesticity, towards an empowered feminist individualism in the public sphere via the art world.

Yalçın wanted to connect with her childhood. To create her work, she first drew onto the fabrics directly, tracing photos that represented happy, positive memories, and then embroidered over the lines, which are painstakingly rendered with perfectionist clarity through the anchoring of her black thread. In a way, her holistic reclamation of self is further emphasized by her grounding the over-atomized trends of photography back, literally, into her hands.

She admits that embroidering detailed faces would demand a different order of challenges that she was not prepared to tempt, but by conveying the untainted emptiness of the fabric from chin to forehead the works retain an innocence, while simultaneously provoking an unsettling sense of oblivion for outsiders who, strange to the family and her life, will never be able to sympathize with an emotional expression. Everyone is left to wonder how the girl might feel, always pictured alone. And it is the gift of transpersonal imagination that Yalçın offers, as to read a nighttime fairy tale and be swept away with the utterly private inventions of a half-conscious mind on the edge of dreaming.

Three years ago, Yalçın identified as a feminist painter, affirming her solidarity with other young women in Turkey through her use of colors especially. Afterwards, she saw embroidery as an apt technique to explore such social concerns in her creativity. Her mother had always embroidered on practically everything, and taught her how to do the same. More, the circular frame characteristic to the embroidery craft signified the psychological, human interior for her. For the four outdoor scenes at her show, she employed rectangular frames in contrast.

When she embroiders, she intuits her mother's frame of mind, as she had observed her during the endless hours in the outlying Yenimahalle district of Ankara. Her art practice is a way for her to remember. But she approaches it in the spirit of experimentalism, as a trained draftswoman and former painting student at Marmara University in Istanbul, and at the Academia Sztuk Pieknych



in Poland, showing her art in Germany, South Korea and Moldova. Her intention is for people to see her work as a kind of drawing, as she stands firm in her founding identity as a painter. In other words, she is an artist of space, as her lines fill the void with a powerful levity, as to look through the eyes of a child and marvel at the mundane.

"When we consider our past relationships, we see that this theme is more about standing side by side, intersecting separate spaces of belongings," said Gözde İlkin, explaining her work, *Inverted Home* during the 15th Istanbul Biennial in 2017.

For this piece, I once again worked with old fabrics I gathered from family members. So it might seem more home-oriented but it actually a complete opposite process of belonging because it reverses the whole information we have about belonging by taking those fabrics and objects reminiscent of homes out of context.

Led by embroiderers like Gözde İlkin and the rising Damla Yalçın, a wave of emerging artists are raising fabrics of needle and thread to the light, as they birth visual proclamations that assert the innate beauty of female and feminine forms.

"21st century women's rights movements helped multidisciplinary artists to see what these so-called crafts can offer beyond conventional comprehension to become a voice in the intersectional third wave feminist movement," wrote Gizem Oktay, an aspiring poet and eco-artist inspired by the late textile artist Anni Albers as she embroidered artworks while initiating community engagements with impoverished neighborhoods in Istanbul, as in Nurtepe, from Bomontiada's collaborative Atölye collective.

"I have suffered for being a woman. I read about feminism. I am just a human and woman. I feel my wild side. I feel my ancestors, my woman's pains, my mother, my grandmother. I asked them about this pain. My mother and grandmother made embroidery too, and were also tailors," wrote Belemir Koç, an aspiring artist who dreams of selling her contemporary works of embroidery to move to a house in the mountains.

I want to make embroidery with my postmodern and wild side too. That's new generation art. I started to embroider women into the hoop first. Now, I feel very powerful.

February 14, 1:11 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Lettered

Mr. Yuşa Yalçıntaş is a soft-spoken young gentleman. He exits from the elevator on the third floor of the Juma building in Karaköy, rising through the modern complex of art galleries, to appear in the off-white hall where his exhibition, *Yuka*, is on display. He wears a suit jacket of brown cloth with a felt sweater underneath dyed in a seasonal hue. His smart, casual style is only offset by his sneakers, marked with the black lines expected of streetwear.

When speaking he pauses often, even before uttering a word, at ease in silence. He is patient with himself, deliberating how to cast every phrase in English, like a poker player careful before exposing his hand. But he is not bluffing. His art is the fruit of rigorous devotion. He has worked hard to learn when to stop drawing. When he begins a new piece he knows that he will be changed when it is done. He will not be the same person. A month is liable to pass in an unbroken fit of daily concentration.

He has learned to rest. Even the creator of the universe needed a break before setting natural laws into motion. Drawing is like praying, he says. He has his rituals. In times past he would listen to music constantly, absorbed through headphones, fixing his artist's gaze into the precise impressions he refines with an eye for metaphysics and a multidisciplinary skill set with a variety of technical pencils fit for architects, also rendering his 2D work into sculpture, installation and digital art.

But for *Yuka*, he revised his practice. He drew in silence. For the months that he trained his eyes to draw his latest series, he did not listen to music at all. It was a revelation. And the result is apparent when his works come into focus. They are meticulously crafted specimens of both contemporary and timeless iconographies, cinematographic narratives staging children's games to comment on the cerebral simulacra of worldly life, encompassing symbolist mysticism from the Kabbalah to Gnosticism, blending Japanese aesthetics with Turkish nostalgia.

The art of Yalçıntaş interacts with levels of mental cognition beyond common sense and ordinary consciousness towards what neuroscientists understand as the interconnected parts of the brain responsible for inner contemplation, called the "Default Mode Network." He draws from esoteric signs that induce meditative effects, triggering inward reflection guided by his self-reflexive awareness of the thin facades of perception, the light, truly weightless foundation of existence, the shallow ground of being.

In other words, Yalçıntaş employs the metaphor of *Yuka* to question the dominant, materialist paradigm that is endemic to unchecked, global-warming capitalism, which forwards that reality is a construct, more, that it is fully automatic and mostly void. Instead, a more apt metaphor, however archaic from the ancient beliefs of India and Mexico as only two examples, realize creation as more of an act, a dance, an artwork.

The proponents of "visionary art" are essentially advocates of alternative ways of being in the visible and invisible multiverse. They have sought to relay the enlightening and mystifying facets of creative existence through technical advances and age-old crafts that color and shape a vitalized, personal, cosmic experience of consciousness.

Surrealism and Dada renewed the Visionary spirit in Western art. Yet, where Surrealism discarded the raw materials of shamanistic exploration and Dada sought to slough off reason, Visionary artists came full circle, not as another reactionary interwar ideology, but to reunite local symbols from cultures around the world with universal wisdom.

From the fifteenth century Dutch draftsman Hieronymus Bosch to the Maltese painter Laurence Caruana, countless visual storytellers of all kinds are considered visionary when they convey the image-language of the collective mind, towards an evocation of what the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell coined as the "monomyth," framing the combined likeness of the world soul through a global harmony of images, archetypes, myths, religions and philosophies shared and developed throughout history.

床 is the Japanese kanji ideogram for *Yuka*, which Yalçıntaş refashioned out of seven pieces of white string, and hung under the window in the stairwell leading to the gallery space at Pi Artworks Istanbul. Yalçıntaş studied Japanese for the last eight months to learn how its grammar and roots are shared with Turkish, his mother tongue. He cross-analyzed the Turkish philology of *yufka* (thin flour) with Mongolian, Finnish, and the extant Anatolian usage of *yuka* for a shallow plane. He broke down each stroke of the *Yuka* kanji as the words for tree and roof to explain its definition as the wooden floor of old Japanese homes.

In his words, Yalçıntaş uses childlike illustration aesthetics as a language. He has a house style all his own, reminiscent of the naive portraits and cartographies drawn by characters from the films of Wes Anderson, and in a certain light he could very well be one. He strategizes deftly and arranges orderings of his self-curated methods of madness like a precocious prodigy with a preternatural instinct for "white cube" installations. By the Pi gallery door, a monitor plays a video on repeat, framing Yalçıntaş in its infinite blankness, the empty canvas slowly occupied prior to the opening of *Yuka*.

Yalçıntaş always starts his drawings from the ground up. But his exacting, geometrical interpretations of flooring are curiously suspended, outlined into a context of spatial abstraction, floating as in zero gravity, or via a digital matrix. Linguistic fascinations run throughout his work and into his well-rounded approach to self-education. He is quick to talk about Turkish words like *otur*, literally, "sit," often used as a verbal synonym for "reside," because, as he clarified, Turks were originally Central Asian steppe nomads who sat on the carpeted floors of tents. For him and for his ancestors, the ground is integral to settlement, urbanization, play and death.

With an eye for minimalism, Yalçıntaş bases his figurative approach on the main, overarching concept that he intends to represent, hanging strings to emulate lines on the page, also repeating

patterns like open pools to muse on water, fire, air and earth. He abandons normative dualities like interior and exterior. To him, the floor of a home and the soil outdoors are one and the same. In a related manner, he notices how his thoughts are seamless between Turkish and Japanese grammars, whereas English requires another mentality entirely.

His tendency to interrelate points of reference connects *Yuka* with his first solo show, *Causa Sui*, a Latin reference to Spinoza. It opened at Pi Artworks Istanbul in 2016 to center an earlier version of his piece, *Broken Altar*, chronicling the transformation of a four-sided, pyramidal human face. It is a three-dimensional fixation on the symmetry and disintegration of the four directions, also depicted in shades of grey. The mandalic infinitude and focal nucleus of the complementary drawing recalls the emergence of matter, often described as an unthinkably hot, dense point, one that Turkic shamans, ancient Egyptians, medieval Kabbalists and modern astrophysicists all agree initiated the expansion of the universe.

"It started with children's books. I went to a boarding school. I always used to go to the library and look at pictures. Those images stayed in my mind," said Yalçıntaş, whose knack for visual literacy is as encyclopedic as it is unique to his mild-mannered, lucid personality.

I saw that there was a connection between children's games and rituals. In the past, they didn't separate religion, science and art. After the Renaissance, these separations came to the West.

Yalçıntaş recognized a metaphor for all of human behavior in children's games. His works are optical illusions in the spirit of a kind of representational, Escher-like op-art. In order to show the shallow, thin, *Yuka* degree of thickness in his depictions of the floating ground layer on which his figures and scenes stand, he scales his paper medium to a certain size. The effect is like a board game, only his deft figurative realism contrasted within a hyper-logical fantasy is unsettling, like walking into a story by Lewis Carroll.

"I combine Jewish mysticism, shamanism, Japanese and Far Eastern cultures together with Turkish miniatures. In architecture, you have to destroy to build. Afterwards, creation comes with stories, with people who will have memories there. Destruction is the first step," said Yalçıntaş, who sees art gallery visits as a kind of game where people move between squares and cubes in search of an object, whether conceptual or material, to grasp.

I give myself rules. Then, a few years later, I can also destroy those rules.

February 20, 4:34 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Perfectionist

The traditional forms of the Islamic religion do not often flower into fully embraceable visions of universality, as its aniconic culture is disinclined to naturalist depiction, too often perplexing foreigners by its mystic obscurities, its dense geometries of abstraction. And its ruling tastemakers throughout history have prohibited the representation of any approximation of divinity. Its faithful philosophers have always emphasized the limits of reason, to place a sharp accent on the absolute inability of human beings, as with any materiality, to express the truly sacred, spirituality of existence, as a part may not presume its whole.

Through the integrated wisdom of anatomical calligraphy, and the time-worn techniques of the illuminated manuscript as a vessel of eternal knowledge, Murat Morova relays the Abrahamic claim to direct relationship with the ultimate source of reality, and with ample consciousness of its superhuman power. He transforms the symbols of prophetic enlightenment with a subtle, yet firm grasp of the human soul, steeped in the sandstorm wilderness of the Arabic language, to fill the unscripted vowels of its charm with a personal voice, releasing howls of unrequited love, as in the allegorical, seventh century Bedouin fable of Leyla and Majnun.

Intoxicated by the abundant aromas of his wild bouquet of intellectual stimuli, spanning the cinematic, literary and musical imagination of cultural history since the dawn of recorded time, he relishes in the fantastical preoccupations of the twenty-first century, a high Renaissance man of the information age, alone with his blank slates of fresh starts, voracious for the breadth of the world and the finest treasures of humanity and nature, all within the instantaneous reach of his fingertip smudged against the glass of a touchscreen, or by the virtual entry of a key into the unfolding, infinite saga of computerized interpersonal communication.

Like a genuine Romantic of the nineteenth century European city incarnate in the body of a living Turkish artist, Morova dreams up his visual vocabulary, his distinct signature, under cascades of visionary, imagistic language to traverse his polymathic interests, from Sumerian mythology to medieval psychology, pre-modern cartography, and on down a byzantine cacophony of evolutionary inventions refashioned anew into his latest series of paintings. *Cosmic Latte* demands a leap of secular faith, of belief in the perceivable, as by seekers in search of novel and cathartic neuroesthetic experience.

In the spare, block hall of Galeri Nev Istanbul, wanderers with peeled eyes become confident seers with every eggshell-breaking footstep into the library hush of the fourth floor inside Mısıf Apartment. Once blinded, deafened and muted by the globalized disillusionments of İstiklal Avenue's historic, philhellenic promenade, the uninitiated are doused in a baptism of symbols, consummated by the immediacy of sight.

The veil of the arcane is lifted by the exquisite gift of Morova, who details the transcendental rite of passage from the human form to the omnipotent presence, an impersonal voyage characterized by ego dissolution, which awaits the patient, good and optimistic travelers on the Sufi path. A

pilgrimage of historians and lovers, convinced of the sublime beauty of art, are then compelled further into the heart of creation.

The nonlinear waterwheel of nineteen cyclically curated paintings at *Cosmic Latte* have no beginning, and no end. As models of the various states of the human form, his work is akin to what the artist Alex Grey conceived for his "Sacred Mirrors" series, which he originally showed for the masses in a self-styled theosophical chapel in New York City to reflect the material, psychological and spiritual orders of being through twenty-one life-sized, full-body portraits.

When the public is subject to transparent visions and silent harmonies that suspend the elusive joy of realizing the great mystery of life, they are changed, and are able to stand strong and fast, grounded against weakness and destruction, armed with meaning, happiness, beauty and creation. People open up from within and are moved by the principle of perfection when absorbing potent art that guides them with a gentle hand.

Observant and willing, the courageous stumble and feel through the unlit, pathless way that leads to the atonement of matter and energy, toward a fusion of physicality, bound to separation, with the pure freedom of experimental chaos, to embody the essence and holism of selfhood, at one, complete, perfect. When opposites are united, even by the seemingly artificial channel of visual metaphor, or through a spiritual craft, the amalgamation of the contrast is as reverent as it is metaphysical, similar to how masculine and feminine bodies produce an androgynous embryo.

Morova frequently depicts the final polarity between life and death, resurrecting an attention to the botanical details of flowers that recalls the bygone aesthetics of Islam's golden ages of learning, when scientific process integrated a mystical affirmation of the natural world, when the planet was understood as a hidden trove of philosophical truths. His eye for color and its absence is especially vivid in his vegetal stills. Violet and coral petals grow from a pot of skeletons. A circular frame has a calligraphic body with a haloed skull pointing upward with a red rose and downward with a dead flower the color of the yellowed backdrop.

Another is a diptych of post-Romantic landscapes that reflect the geographical dichotomy of East and West. The calligraphic human form dances throughout with the muscular heroism of a demigod, like an unfettered spiritual being, extra-dimensional against the un-peopled environment, lost to history while also maintaining an otherworldly design reminiscent of the 2011 film, *Melancholia* by Lars von Trier. Its contrasts balance the Italian and Turkish countryside with stone structures retaining oriental and neoclassical features.

Morova works like an alchemist of the contemporary, filling whatever gaps continue to divide the omnipresent phenomena of opposition in all fields of knowledge. From the religious to the naturalist, his art asserts that the universe is greater than the sum of its parts. He activates the opaque emptiness of its invisible space with the enchanting light of the "cosmic latte" shade that astronomers from John Hopkins University found to be the color of the universe in 2001 after researching the spectrums of some 200,000 galaxies.

Up through the stale, chalky air of a pale, concrete stairwell, Galeri Nev Istanbul welcomes with a sleek aura, imbued with the paranormal atmosphere that exudes from the paintings of Morova, held up inside the inner chamber like the holiest of the holies in one of Istanbul's proudest residential complexes, Mısır Apartment, named by an Ottoman khedive of Egypt whose 1910 commission signified the twilight of imperial glory, its facade exemplifying the ornate decor of an architectural triumph unsurpassed along the storied pedestrian thoroughfare.

The works appear as out of time, like a fictive Borgesian codex transmitted from another dimension, as in the internationalist Argentine's 1975 story, *The Book of Sand*. The antiquated visage of his paintings evoke the illustrated leaves of an ancient manuscript, vitalized with contemporary immediacy. Each painting pulses with his impassioned attempts to assimilate the Sufi understanding of *insan-ı kâmil*, from the Turkish for the perfect human, into approachable art visible to Western eyes. To express the internalization of totality, he expanded the notion of personal space, and growth, to intergalactic proportions, bridging cosmic divergences and cultural paradigms.

To attain perfection as a human being, Sufi teachings demand transcendence of the worldly realms, of clothing, the body, culture, Earth, even the mind. Morova mirrored traditional thought with the increasingly dispersed human form. With the outline of the body as a symbol, mere language turns it into a figment as sheer as see-through silk, and as fragile, with its aspects labeled in Arabic terms for self-knowledge. Every last strand of familiarity is shed for undivided, spatial independence from any source, center, or origin point, from any sense of self.

His brushstrokes evidence the rhythms and techniques of an honest and humble working man as the ideal ascetic. Bent over delicate, stained canvases, he is not afraid to impress its surface with the points of his lifelong vocation, to merge his individual art practice with the inborn will to human perfection. Years of hours pass, and, weightless, he falls, trusting the universe, free in his abiding meditation through art.

February 28, 12:52 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Voice

In 1918, Semiha Berksoy was eight years old when her mother, the painter Fatma Saime, passed away, a victim of the Spanish Flu. The late Ottoman woman wears an emerald green top in the roughly sketched pastel that hangs within a spectrum of portraits at Galerist, spotlighting how Semiha Berksoy transfigured her loved ones.

Swathed in a rapid of cobalt with rivulets of etchings into paper, the imaginary portrait is staggering for its sharpness. The eye of her mother is tightened with a viridescent incision, her nose and lips streaked with verdant hues. Surrounding her mother, poised with dash and class, the textural wash of marine blue recalls the aquatic landscape around the shorefront mansions of Çengelköy where the artist staged her first dramas as a precocious girl ripe for the stage. Along its sloping districts on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus, locals still savor yogurt drinks and strong tea on balmy days under ancient plane trees.

She would rush home after primary school with her latest illustrated poems to show her mother who believed in the spirituality of art. Her mother embroidered and tailored haute couture beside painting. She taught Semiha to sing. When practicing Mozart at home in the Moralı Mehmet Bey mansion, she demonstrated how dancing accompanies singing.

Three years before the death of her mother, her father the poet Ziya Cenap balanced his fez on his head and his daughter in his arms as his wife stood beside him for a photo. She was wrapped from head to toe in a black shawl, worlds different from the bejeweled, secular woman ready for an aristocratic party as in her portrait, *My Mother The Painter Fatma Saime* (1966). At sixteen, already a performer at Kuşdili Theatre in Kadıköy, her room became a studio where she made watercolor portraits.

"Maybe losing her mother meant being even more liberated, because when you don't have a parental figure, like a mother, you try to bring her back in your memory, and imagination and this can bring out much more," said Senem Özgören, the artist liaison at Galerist, who sees Berksoy as one of the greatest examples of contemporary Turkish art.

The posthumous retrospective of portraits at Galerist remains authentic to the naive, childlike soul of Berksoy the visual artist. Her transcendent hand sketched and painted on both sides of whatever surface she could find. She would douse and refashion her room, furniture, carpets and herself in extravagant, lavish extensions of her palette, her uncanny grasp of form. For her show at the 2005 Venice Biennial, curator Rosa Martinez transplanted her entire bedroom, as Berksoy had transformed it into one seamless work of art.

Despite her prestige, her mixed materials could very well be salvaged from under the bed of any curious teen. Eccentric to a tee, she even used cardboard. With spontaneous affinities to Art Brut, she intuited the abstract expressionism that would galvanize European art as the postwar boom stirred American and global artists to the fore of an aesthetic revolution that continues to



advance. With time, she stands firmer on the front line, as her works grace the limelight of exhibitions around the world, from her recent show at Frieze Masters, London to the upcoming Sharjah Biennial, where her larger-scale, double-sided works will appear.

"For years we were against the selling of her art, including myself because we wanted to open a museum. The museum project still exists, as there are so many things left of her, many memorabilia, paintings, drawings, personal belongings that document the early republic period, its music and theater history," wrote her daughter, Zeliha Berksoy, also a public figure in Turkey as a prominent actress and opera singer.

Semiha Berksoy earned distinction onstage after appearing in the first Turkish opera in music history, *Özsoy*. After the premier on June 19, 1934, Atatürk invited the artists to enjoy an evening together in the center of Ankara. They played billiards and reveled till dawn. He asked her to sing. As a high-dramatic soprano, she made an impression. He encouraged her formal training in Berlin. She later led the 1939 production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Berlin Academy.

The Hitler Youth protested against a Turkish woman leading such a grand performance in Nazi Germany. The conductor, tasked to celebrate the seventy-fifth birthday of Richard Strauss, defended her as the best artist for the role. Titled after the opera, the cloth she painted with oil in 1998 is now strung up in a moodily lit space of its own, evoking her mythical stage presence. While her artworks reach the apex of the global art world, early recordings of her singing are only rarely found on vintage vinyls buried and scattered in the dusty used bookshops of Istanbul.

"She saw herself as Ariadne of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. That painting on cloth shows her in the age she played Ariadne in Berlin. Of course she would mention her experience of Germany of the period: Turkey was rather powerful in 1938-39," wrote Zeliha Berksoy.

Semiha's life was formed as what we may call gesamtkunstwerk. Her career in opera, theater and drama, and her artistic creations all accompanied one another. They were equally important mediums for her artistic outlet. When art was the subject, to medium or form was secondary to her. She was all three of them.

Traveling between Istanbul and Berlin as an opera singer, she penned a surrealist play, *The Letter from the Grave*. It was an adaptation of her five-year love affair with Nazım Hikmet, the poet laureate of Turkish literature, but it was only produced underground. His imprisonment wrenched her heart, and compelled her to write volumes of letters, some of which are published. Although there are no portraits of Hikmet at Galerist, she depicted him in her paintings with an almost obsessive frequency likened to her keeping his personal effects, such as his bow tie, quoting his features in about one out of every thirty of her paintings.

Around 1972, she retired from the opera after a lifetime onstage, which often stifled, and focused more on painting. Nazım went to jail, and she performed in Ankara theater. Her debut as a visual artist was in 1965 at the Ministry of Culture in Paris. It was an exclusive, non-commercial show.

*Ariadne auf Naxos* is displayed closest to the Galerist entrance. It is not the first time her sheet drawings are appearing at Galerist, though it is the only figurative piece of its kind at *Portraits*. As with the American art prodigy Jean-Michel Basquiat, the paintings of Berksoy are at times scrawled with arcane texts, that, like her play, have a hallucinatory style.

Her distance from mainstream Turkish culture is apparent immediately at *Portraits*, as the entrance hallway is furnished with her piece, *Crying (Self-Portrait)*. Painted when the artist was eighty-six years old, it is also indicative of her place in the prevailing cultural milieu in Turkey, while the names of her fellow creatives fade from relevance in the national arts canon. Even her portraits of better-known figures are generally lost to the public imagination.

Muhsin Ertuğrul, an actor and director for the stage and cinema also mentored Berksoy, and Ekrem Reşit Rey, brother of the famous composer Cemal Reşit Rey, wrote books and was among a circle of intellectuals so highbrow that a joke went around saying his cat spoke French. But with a communistic bent sympathetic to Hikmet, she did not merely paint, or host, artists, writers, philosophers and historians. She studied the facial expressions of her sister Fatima with a minimalist intensity, honing in on the spark in her eyes, as she did with everyone.

The ultimate curation of *Portraits* is a pastel self-portrait from 1959. The artist assimilated the features of her contemporaries, young and old, chronicling a culture on the rise, as its golden age culminated with the promise that the path they forged for future generations of artists in Turkey would not be in vain. The thick, black circles around her eyes contrast with the sweetness of her cherry red lips. Behind her ageless visage of ash and fire, she is a weary prophetess who sees the future of her country, and her figurative vision is hardened by its unsightly reality.

"When I decided to become an actress, she did not teach me. Rather than providing me with her experience, she wanted me to learn for myself, which in the end made me stronger," wrote Zeliha Berksoy, with respect for her mother who suffered as a Turkish woman in the arts.

I would always tell her not to portray me funny like others but to portray me properly in a classical manner. She brings forth the personality of her subject.

March 7, 1:29 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Cautionary

The high stakes of success for artists today are greater than ever. For contemporaries who remember the innocence of earlier days when the critical field could be encompassed by a single vision, certain affinities have aged. Ayşe Erkmen represents a perennial tendency to push the envelope of specificity, in which sites of curation, from the white cube to the open field, inclusive of all art spaces, are redrawn, expanded and turned inward in search of multidimensional engagement with society, nature and culture.

"The art world used to be a smaller world," said the senior critic Jed Perl in an interview for the 2018 book, *What It Means To Write About Art* in which he reflected on his art writing, active as a dissident voice in New York since the 1970s. "But in the end there shouldn't be any difference between how one responds to art in a big gallery or a smaller gallery."

The name Ayşe Erkmen is frequently accompanied by gasps of reverence in public, following her reputation for work that, by virtue of a sculptural integrity, or what might be termed its positive emptiness — likened to negative capability — inhabits experimental space enough to invert preconceived intent, towards a disembodiment of linear values, to welcome newfound tolerance for the uncontrollable elements of being. She experiments like no other, often risking total failure to make art out of labors of love wholly connected to the world, and its obsessions.

That art could be sold, or commoditized in any way, is a modern fantasy, a capitalist ruse, abstract as currency. As a unit of measurement differs from that which is measured, so that which is monetized, auctioned, collected as a vehicle to exchange what are sometimes called art objects, is altogether distinct from the art itself, by that meaning the personal internalization of craft, the lifelong devotion to a discipline, the invention of unprecedented forms of human ingenuity.

To many young artists, and those familiar with the oeuvre of Erkmen, her prolific career demonstrates the indefinable elegance of what it means to make art as a way of life, and to be integrated wholly, as a person in its production. It is to develop environmental consciousness, and to become more socially aware. It is to become more human. Her show, *Danger*, at Ariel embraced the alternative complex of Riverrun in solidarity with longstanding colleagues, including her partner, Bülent Erkmen, whose graphic designs refine the post-minimalist renewability of her creations.

Ariel at Riverrun is a small gallery. Perl, who would not have approached its exhibitions with any less interest than what he might see at MoMA, was the art critic at *The New Republic* for twenty years. The intersection of institutional prestige and cultural entrepreneurialism defines the unique aesthetic at Riverrun, a three-story outfit, two of which are dedicated to off-center shows of works by artists who are vital to the regional contemporary art narrative, for Turkey, and the Eurasian and Middle Eastern milieus, from Sarkis to Mona Hatoum, and also currently with Can Aytekin at the bottom-floor Bunker gallery.

The zone of auteurism directed by Norgunk art book publishers Alpagut and Ayşe Gültekin has an outsider allure. Riverrun is titled after the first sentence in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) by James Joyce, and reading it as the metafiction epitome of the anti-novel, with its acrobatics of literary abstraction lends itself to the kind of artwork displayed below the cafe. They are generally opaque with ulterior meanings, indirect and unaligned to immediate comprehension, evading universal digest.

*Chambal* (1999), *Deutsch Bahn* (2002) and *Level 2* (2006) by Ayşe Erkmen are the videos that comprise her show, *Danger*. It is not immediately clear what sense brings them together, not that there should be a common thread. But a stray walker curious enough to spy a view might pass through and exit with the inescapable feeling of deflation, that they left, just caffeinated and disappointed, somehow less full of life than when they arrived, because the anticipation of a thing, of some acquisition of reason, was lost, and all that remained was the chance to be initiated, through a network of insiders, into verbal explanations, a sort of informal, social pedagogy demanding face-to-face interaction.

There are texts tacked to the wall, in the bookish spirit of Riverrun, quoting Ayşe Erkmen, to provide intellectual context to the exhibition. They read like the letters of a mature artist reflecting on the scope of her career, as to arrange the order of her thoughts and memories into a continuous, thematic whole. She became a radical young sculptor because she realized that no one was noticing. In that terrible silence, lacking serious critical engagement, without the dialogue of sincerely opinionated reviews, she was compelled to make herself understood. Independent of a studio, and even at times of materials, she is known to work with the mechanics of the space in which her work is shown as an integral aspect of her intervention.

"With each work, I start from scratch. Surely, they're all interconnected but which one connects to which one in which timeframe, that's not necessarily evident. Sometimes, similarities between the works become manifest years later," she wrote, employing a spectrum of tools throughout her career in which she has exhibited continuously for over twenty years and never broke from producing with everything from metal to stone, plastic, paper, sound, film, video, animation, and countless other varieties.

"Besides, it saves me from adopting a particular visual style. But I guess, it also makes me somewhat less decipherable."

The cinematic lion roars, and barreling out of its gaping jaw, across its vibrating tongue issues the fearless proclamation of the Buddha, expressing the cosmic order as virtue. From left to right, the work, *Chambal* sounds off, setting into motion an oceanic storm. Its waves crash mercilessly against the submerged foundations of a lighthouse. A man braves the life-threatening deep as he stands, exposed, awaiting rescue. He appears like a human figure cut out of the sea-battered stone, undaunted by the walls of water as they sway and collapse in the heady gusts. The

photographer, Jean Guichard first caught the scene, *la Jument*, and Erkmen, who came across the image while traveling by train in Germany, later mobilized his still.

"Her approach to material and subject is minimal, to the point and poetic at the same time. What I like most about her work is that she has this care for material. She makes alterations to what is already there, as little as possible. I find that approach to be beautiful. And it's going to be necessary in the coming years, because we can't just keep adding," said Müveddet Nisan Yıldırım, the gallery assistant at Riverrun, who is also a translator and poet.

The exhale of the lion, and the storm, are then diminished by a breeze knocking against a building for *Level 2* (2006), in which Erkmen portrays the postindustrial climate of life as a cultural worker between cities. She takes a heightened perspective, out of reach, overlooking an unpeopled street, semi-obscured by a double windowpane. A banner flaps noisily in the air that somehow feels cold, removed, as perception is compartmentalized by the nexus of interior and exterior architecture in confrontation with itself, inside a frame of total urbanization. When writing the seminal essay, *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism* (1976), the art critic Rosalind Krauss analyzed the meaning of focus, to consider the significance of pointing at the center of a screen. Her assertions began from the idea that video art was a mockery of abstraction, an example of what she termed "Duchampian irony".

"That an artist's work be published, reproduced and disseminated through the media has become, for the generation that has matured in the course of the last decade, virtually the only means of verifying its existence as art," wrote Krauss, intuiting the effects of social media on the art world three decades early, while noting video as a trans-media form that communicates psychology as the defining, reflexive tool of the modern artist.

The demand for instant replay in the media - in fact the creation of work that literally does not exist outside of that replay, as is true of conceptual art and its nether side, body art - finds its obvious correlative in an aesthetic mode by which the self is created through the electronic device of feedback.

Erkmen created an aural space that is imposing, not only by the offbeat and ravishing visuals of its looping videos, but for its unavoidable, intermeshed sounds. The clanking of metal, a bestial cry and the tempest-tossed sea reverberate incessantly, and with obnoxious clamor, vying for human attention in a dim, subterranean art gallery.

March 21, 7:42 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Beginner

The concrete floor of the warehouse is cold. Early spring breezes through the openings at its entrance and garden exit. Temporary roofing creaks like inflated plastic. There are names on the walls. Along its halls, there are frames. Objects stand, hang, drape and lean. Against the stark emptiness of the space itself, visions leap from paper, canvas, metal, wood, and fiber. Ranges of color are encapsulated in squares and rectangles. Spectrums press the envelopes of geometric shape. Textures familiar and strange mark oblong forms with alien dimensions.

Interpretive maps are marked at both ends. They diagram a chart that resembles a maze out of a laboratory experiment. Each visual artist is numbered. Certain themes are curated to align common points of reference, some to provide the graphic equivalent of counterpoint. Palettes are coded, mediums placed in continuity. Styles and techniques correlate works curated in latticed rows, intercalated columns, and varieties of dynamic fields for the eye to compare and contrast, dilate and define.

Most artworks are illustrative, figurative, and representational. Such is characteristic of initial ventures on the path to finding a voice in an art world ruled by contemporary notions of the unprecedented concept. In response to late capitalist production, the artist serves a crucial role to check the balance of invention and artifice, between the original and its copies. As a fair like Mamut Art Project conveys, diverging from the primacy of conceptualism, the beginning foundations of art remain integral, not only for pedagogy, but for exhibition and sale.

Nature and industry are presented as opposites in the mind of human civilization. Yet, at a deeper psychological level, they rise from one source, and are, to a degree, codependent principles. The painter Mehmet Resul Kaçar conducts a dialogue between the past and present. His work comments on cultural manufacture as a major advertising prompt that disguises and reintroduces historical anachronisms like slavery into the wage economy. It is a welcome reflection for the youngest generation of workers, artists among them, to reconsider the effects of freelance and speculative opportunity as self-imposed exploitation.

Kaçar animates his research paradigm with gruesome scenes of medieval battle, backgrounded by a warm beige hue reminiscent of dry grasslands and straw bale. In two of his largest works, human beings are besieged by ravenous dogs when not sparring and jousting in full armor. He is a stylist of cracked paint. There are spinning whorls and dashes of action that provide motion to his otherwise still landscapes. The relationship between people and animals is examined with humor by Çağan T. Okuyan, who pictured an "immigrant story told through kebab and *döner*".

Plants, like people, require water, air and sunlight. Every individual has roots, by that meaning a connection to place. For some whose lives are broadly dispersed across the face of the planet, ecological identity is as confounding as navigating body positive self-consciousness. *Kebab Project* by Okuyan was equally an act of respect for his grandfather, Fuat, who was a lifelong

cook. Traversing the regions of Adapazarı, Adana, Mardin and Gaziantep, he then retraced his migrant heritage from Paris to Berlin.

Okuyan used video, audio, collage, linocut, analog photography, Super 8mm film, tiles, and ceramics to retrace the steps of his family history through playful adaptations of moments from everyday life in Turkey. In one photograph, a young woman is dressed in true hipster fashion with a nylon windbreaker over a hoodie, strapped with a pink fanny pack. She wields a long *döner* knife, ready to slice and dice. The older man behind her laughs.

Reclaiming style from the mundane drudgery of greasy spoon stands is one way to assert a brand of boundless, youthful confidence that becomes meaningful when addressing multigenerational displacement, and the enduring effects of immigration. The new media artist Hasan Mert Öz tackled related considerations with his stills and video, *Son of Noah*. In the post-apocalyptic desert of his conception, a lone man is barefoot on the sunbaked sand. He is lost in a virtual reality headset, maddened by a private world hidden from all but the technological solipsism of his metaphysical experience.

The multidisciplinary sculptor Delal Şeker resurrected the houbara, a large bird hunted to extinction in Turkey. It moved slowly in open country, making it an easy target. Its spindly, awkward legs protrude like an insect in the hands of Şeker, its bulbous torso has the contours of an exoskeleton. She draws out the likeness of the destroyed creature, as to demonstrate an alternative to its vanishing by reinserting its figure into contemporary life.

Her sculptures, both when photographed in starkly distinct, remote landscapes and on the exhibition floor, speak to the grave lack of popular awareness about species extinction. In an especially dramatic photograph, one of her sculptures is in a field like that which the houbara may have pecked, only there are concrete shells of high rises on the horizon. With the sentiments of a technological futurist, she seeks to return life to abused environments.

Şeker exposes and redirects anthropocentric perspectives, deconstructing the manipulative pretense of empty human creation as the cause of irreversible death in nature. With photographic surrealism, *Moving Portraits* by the artist Barbaros Kayan also takes an advocacy stance, only in response to war. His works are riveting, as they replace the body of human subjects with the material of cities demolished by military might. He exercised an expert, steady focus, as his anonymous portraits are outlined with seamless, razor-sharp integration.

A short figure stands in front of a circus tent printed with Italian words. His shadow is cast in the morning sun over rocky dirt. The outline of his body appears slightly raised from his surroundings by a virtual edge. Instead of picturing an impression of his clothing and face, chalky white stone and munition shells are held within his unearthly frame. Kayan is viscerally talented with color. One of his pieces shows a portrait foregrounding a refugee tent city, as the blurred bodily frame holds an image of a blasted wall, a traumatic memory of armed conflict.

Kayan sought to tell the story of what Syrian refugees found when they returned home after living in exile. He traveled between Turkey and Syria from 2016 to 2018, gleaning material from the city of Ayn al-Arab in the Aleppo region. Another artist of the social realist persuasion is Ekin Çekiç, whose series of photographs about horse racing are devastatingly poignant, and also convey the beautiful musculature of physical power and the unsightly horrors of its misuse.

In one piece, a black stallion is tied up from tail to head, and struggles to rise, and to fall. Again, young contemporary artists are moved, like fellow environmentalist youth, to take a moral stand in society, as to reconnect with the animal kingdom. And looking within, the artist has autobiographical content aplenty in the human body and its discontents. In some ways, modern urbanization, with its overburdened densities of concrete jungle, has centered the body under the light of physiological reflection as the primary, and in extreme circumstances, exclusive method through which to engage with the natural world.

The ironical paradox of harmonizing with the world through narcissistic convenience is a condition well expressed in a series of dystopian paintings by REI, titled, *I had great fun. Thanks and bye*. After studying the patient narratives compiled by psychiatrist Irvin D. Yalom, the surrealistic artwork that resulted is fantastic in the oldest sense of the word. REI took special interest in the case of a seventy-year-old obsessive named Thelma, whose life was eccentric enough to justify titling her story, *Love's Executioner*.

She spills her morning coffee over her face, as it drips down her cheek. Her fork is a hand digging its fingernails into the kitchen table. Her chest and arms are cut with self-inflicted signs of unrequited love. Her nose and eyes are red after a night of crying fits. Beside her sits a cartoonish stick figure holding a lit cigarette. Household wares are out of proportion. She is in a nightmarish wonderland of the raw, leftover morning.

With like-minded, macabre affinities, the sculptor Özüm Koşar mirrored profane geometry for the installation, *Fragmented Body*. Excavating the oft-quoted analyses of Lacan and Freud, the anatomical works escape and return from a psychic, ethereal plane unknown. They are petrified, undressed, halved and piecemeal. The processes of decomposition and birth are indistinguishable, reflecting the parallel disappearance and emergence of new art.

April 3, 8:28 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Futurist

The artist sits inside a flat-screen television. His daughter is sandwiched between him and his wife. They wear half-frowns of apathy, listless and aloof. The scene is the subject of an engraving titled, *Monument To The Time Elapsed III* (2018), one of two monitors scratched to frame images rendered with expert manual technique by Krassimir Terziev for his solo show *Future Unforgettable*, at Versus Art Project.

He cut the second engraving, *Monument To The Time Elapsed IV* (2016-2017) into a tablet screen. It is an auto-portrait. His hand reaches, as through an ethereal black background, toward the other on the opposite side of the device. He engraves with a photographic realism, opening his hand to grasp at the Pandora's box of the twenty-first century.

The larger-than-life, meticulously etched selfie in *IV* reflects the stature of its creator. Terziev is a prominent, award-winning staple in the internationalist art world. His works frequently appear in institutions throughout the world, including Sofia, where he lives and works as a member of the Institute of Contemporary Art. He was a founder of the InterSpace New Media Art Centre, which ran from 1998 to 2004. In Turkey, he has appeared in fairs and exhibitions aplenty, from the Mardin Biennial to Salt Beyoğlu.

"In the late 1980s the media of video entered the field of new Bulgarian art as a means of documenting performances, happenings and actions," wrote Terziev, in a first-person essay that he published at *Open Art Files*, elaborating on his broad liberal education which has spanned postgraduate studies in the painting department at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, to the Cultural Anthropology program at Sofia University.

In the current decade art video on the contemporary art scene in Bulgaria is undergoing a new shift in dynamics.

A pair of videos at his current Istanbul show were produced in 2015 and 2016, titled, *Between Flashback and Deja-vu*. They document the bleak horizon that defines urban life in his Balkan nation as it continues to reel from the lingering maladaptation of the communist era. Bulgaria is located between Turkey and Romania on the fringes of the EU.

In six and a half, and nine minutes, respectively, his videos at *Future Unforgettable* employ flying drone photography to arrange dialogue on the divergent nature of perspective. The seer is seen when the agents of perception becomes the subject. Ascending to the window of his high-rise studio, the camera pans upward to survey the building, as it is scaled and increasingly spliced with a still frame shot from a tripod on the balcony. The fixed shot presents a panorama of the unsightly Sofia cityscape on a cold, blue day.

The camera passes the stained concrete exterior of honeycomb apartments protected from the elements by rusted grilles and polished glass. The two cameras meet in a fit-inducing flicker. The effect is rendered in both videos. Postindustrial urban aesthetics are cast under a raw light. His unwavering gaze, absent of human presence, mixes an imagistic binary. He frames a nonverbal, moving conversation on the visual impressions of automation.

The present, unsustainable life for human beings in the inhospitable realm of space has its equivalent in the utterly inconvenient truths of climate change. In purely mental terms, the mass majority of people on the planet today may as well reside on the moon. The infrastructure of modern life depends on energy sources that fuel space technology. As a planetary whole, moderns demonstrate an unhealthy degree of physical abstraction from the land, sea and air.

To aestheticize and exploit the earth for politics and culture, is a bad habit of global society bent on infinite growth. It is as complex as mystifying as the origins of the universe. In the show, *Future Unforgettable*, the art of Terziev, emphasizes the extraterrestrial needs of earthlings. His work, *Family* (2013), is reflected in the glossy flat-screen monitor on which he engraved the likenesses of his weary wife and bored daughter beside his characteristically glum mug.

*Family* pictures a trio of astronauts, two adults flanking a child, all in space suits holding hands on the surface of the moon. In the reflection of each face mask, Terziev quoted resemblances of the famed photographs from the Apollo 11 lunar mission. His intervention artwork, *Yet To Be Titled* (2019), manipulates the iconic photograph of the earth from space, said to have launched the environmental movement. The stark image shines through a lightbox, with the silhouette of a palm tree partially obscuring the magnificent aquamarine aura of the planet.

While such themes may appear to unearth the contrivances of Cold War anachronisms, the space race continues. Turkey decreed its inaugural space agency in February not long before India became the fourth country to shoot down a satellite in March. The act challenged Israel's aim to follow Russia, China and the U.S. to the lunar surface in less than two weeks. Terziev is prescient. Three figures stand on the moon in *Family*, and someone has arrived.

"Outer space - the most successful metaphor of the eternally unreachable all - is still far enough to let us fill it also with all the technological garbage generated on the planet and the dreams for the future and salvation of humankind," wrote Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva, a notable Bulgarian curator who collaborated with Terziev.

For Krassimir Terziev domesticating space has been both subject matter and artistic strategy since 2008.

Terziev has gone a step further, inviting a biblical sense of irony with his opposing works, *Apollo Albino Programme* (2017) and *Apollo Melanist Programme* (2018), in which animals, all white in the former and black in the latter, appear on the lunar surface to give the moon landing with a prophetic context, in the vein of Genesis, only with Noah as a spacewalker, and the ark a

spacecraft. The only aspect of the story that may remain consistent is the flood, especially with the threat of sea level rise.

Beyond the elitism of cultural manufacturing, art informed by technological advances takes on a special significance in a country like Bulgaria, which develops while stabilizing bordered territory potent with the age-old clash of neighboring, and internalized civilizations. It is a reality that Terziev drew astutely with pen on paper, for his piece, *Study for Base and Superstructure* (2018), which shows the transformation of architectural forms.

The foundation of the fictive, agglomeration of building styles begins like a rectangular, steel skyscraper and soon encompasses the oriental archways of synagogues, the spires of mosques and domes of churches, topped with a communist star. His watercolors *How Many Policemen I* (2015) and *How Many Policemen II* (2018) illustrate the geometry of authoritarian power. Another painting, *Night For Day I* (2018) relates similar subject matter in shades of black. Its point is strengthened by the polarity of rigid, masculine officialdom standing on the edges of a pool filled with lively, public swimmers.

Mirroring his black and white, or albino and melanist versions of the Apollo Programme, his dichromatic watercolors are reversed in *Night For Day II* (2018). The inversion of dominance, particularly in the context of nationalism, is cleverly presented in the photographic intervention, *Years Later* (2015). With subtlety, Terziev calls attention to the fact that when dependent on scientific progress, political acts are susceptible to change not only from within society, but also due to physical processes that are consistent throughout the known universe.

*Years Later* reanalyzes visual documentation of the lunar landing, specifically the planting of national flags on the frigid, windless surface. As he explains in a wooden framed printed text, the last man to step on the moon was Gene Cernan, in 1972, who placed the sixth and final flag. But there is a striking photo op that has not made it into popular culture because no satellite has the capacity to reproduce the detail. The catch to planting national flags on the moon is that they all turn surrender white not long after they are left exposed to the ultraviolet light of the sun.

Terziev relays the message that space is telling humanity, namely, that the relativity of opposites outlasts the petty competition over earthly differences. *Future Unforgettable* is an exercise in universal duality. Floating between celestial bodies, astronauts and spacecraft follow more fundamental laws than that promised by the futurist imagination. At the tail end of gallery halls at Versus Art Project, a wall tacked with photographs and texts depicts many examples of fallen debris, and how otherworldly they look on the surface of the earth.

April 5, 2:41 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Contemporary

A red carpet was rolled out. The tip of its tongue curled up, moist on the sidewalk curb, before falling limp onto the cobbled street. The names and faces of Istanbul's art world were out in full regalia on a rainy, Friday night in February. They were greeted by servers with trays of complimentary drinks sparkling in tumblers and crystals. Fine appetizers were camouflaged by earthy stoneware. Circles formed, mostly into the young and the older. Laughter was heard. Everyone anticipated a speech and music before they could finally let their hair down and party.

The preview event for STEP Istanbul was held in Tomtom Kırmızı, which simply means, Tomtom Red. It had an edgy air. The rusty-hued paint was chipped off the timeworn concrete walls, uninsulated and breathing through glassless window frames. It had the mood of a wintry netherworld, fascinated by itself enough to turn inward, and be gone from the dim, cold planet outside. Through its concave geometric interior of halls, an impromptu crowd stood guard around a platter of wraps and spreads. Though it was rarely touched.

Behind a swarm of impassioned conversationalists, an untitled work of graffiti worked its way up the wall like a sinuous creeper. It was the mark of Hasan Pehlevan, a Diyarbakır-born street artist who has since turned the switch on gallery shows with his op-art interventions before and after inner-city demolitions. His piece at Tomtom Kırmızı resembled that which he had exhibited for the group show, *Op Not Pop* at Plato art gallery on the campus of Ayvansaray University, curated by Marcus Graf.

Known for crafting what has been called the "Demolition Aesthetic" with his solo show, *Formicarium* at Pg Art Gallery in the winter of 2017, he has lately collaborated with Günnür Özsoy, who is endearingly referred to as a sculptress of memory. Pehlevan and Özsoy have become staples at Istanbul's flagship annual art fair, Contemporary Istanbul, which, by inaugurating STEP in springtime, aims to widen its audience engagement by further vitalizing Tomtom, where the neighborhood's trendy Designhood has vibrantly stirred but not shaken the urban palette with its impressively multifaceted, open-air maker's market bazaar.

Below the entrance floor at Kırmızı, a turntable spun under the light hands of Lunar Plane, and drinks were poised to cheer speakers, Hakan Kodal, Ayşegül Temel, Ali Güreli and Rabia Bakıcı Güreli. There was a projection over the stairwell of a 4K single channel video loop titled, *Wall Street* (2018) by the Oddviz collective, consisting of three Ankara-born artists, Çağrı Taşkın, Erdal İnci and Serkan Kaptan.

*Wall Street* utilized photogrammetry to recapture the lifelike phenomenon of daylight shadows passing over the bronze sculpture, *Fearless Girl* (2017) by Kristen Visbal, originally installed to counter the *Charging Bull* (1989) on Manhattan drive synonymous with the capitalist zeitgeist. Kaptan strolled through Tomtom Kırmızı in streetwear, his style exhibiting the character of that produced by his digital artist trio, of cities redefined by gentrification, and the resilience of creatives with a critical eye on urban sacrifice zones and apocalyptic sea-level rise.

“Step Istanbul is the result of meeting the right people at the right time. We want to make a project where art can touch wider masses and spread enthusiasm,” wrote Hakan Kodal, chairman of the executive board at Tomtom Designhood.

Tomtom is one of the most precious districts in Beyoğlu. It is a cultural treasure with historical texture, atmosphere and locals. We wanted to create the same dynamic success that we created in design, in the field of art. Tomtom is the right place to reach our target audience.

The people at the helm of neighborhood cultural affairs in Tomtom have enjoyed a long friendship with Contemporary Istanbul, which for the last fourteen years has redrawn the art map in Istanbul. Over the years, Kodal has worked closely with Rabia Bakıcı Güreli, vice chairperson of Contemporary Istanbul, since working on an event for CI (Contemporary Istanbul) Magazine. Tomtom upped the partnership in September 2018 when they sponsored the gallery category of Contemporary Istanbul, and invited greater international participation from Portugal.

"Our project certainly aims to end the division between different sociocultural classes and act as a unifying power. That is why we offer 'art for everyone.' We want to eliminate all distinctions including religion, language, race, socio-economic class and build a bridge over art," wrote Ayşegül Temel, the general manager of Tomtom Designhood.

The Italian high school dates back to the 1800s. It has witnessed major historical developments over time, from the birth of the Republic of Turkey to the creation of today's modern Turkey. I believe bringing art to this building offers a unique opportunity to create dialogues between the past and the present.

STEP Istanbul seeks to reframe the conversation in the wake of its enduring success with Designhood. STEP will begin with a three-day exhibition in the garden of the Italian high school. With young collectors in mind, none of the artworks were over 20,000 Turkish liras. It was the first major art project directed by the neighborhood that aspires to the vitality of Soho in New York, Marais in Paris, or Brera in Milan. The millennial art historian and curator Bala Gürçan organized STEP Talks, a speaker series, accompanied by workshops and performances to demonstrate that contemporary art has a place for everyone on the street in daily life.

April 11, 9:16 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Previews

At the 2015 Cunda International Workshop for Translators of Turkish Literature, at least four poems by the leading twentieth century bard Behçet Necatigil were rendered into English. In a few spare lines, he conveyed the passion of unrequited love, the metaphors of shape, the story of a family, and with an emotional range that reflects the colors of a clear sky from morning through the endless night.

"A cool breeze is blowing / You, are all heat / My hands have slipped from yours, the bridge destroyed / How can I bring you to my side / You are distant," Caroline Stockford translated from her poem, *The Bow* (1953), collected in her book, *Old Soil* (in Turkish *Eski Toprak*). Another later poem, *Blood* (1955) delves into epic proportions to bring out such tantalizing phrasings-in-translation as "tomato carnation."

Under a sheet of glass in the middle of Riverrun's ground floor cafe, there are eight artist books by Sarkis, Selim Birsal, Ayşe Erkmen, and Can Aytekin, among others. The publisher Norgunk is housed in an office opposite the basement gallery where the Bunker series has shown works by world-class artists like Mona Hatoum. From top to bottom and throughout its publications and exhibitions, Riverrun maintains a distinctive house design, relaying a sleek minimalism with its mute spectrums and simple contours.

Aytekin was inspired by the Necatigil poem, *Houses* (in Turkish, *Evler*, 1953) for his artist book, which he describes as a kind of fanzine. Last summer, Aytekin had an exhaustive solo show at the prestigious, multi-level Arter gallery on İstiklal Avenue, currently in the process of moving to Dolapdere where it was then preparing to open as Istanbul's new contemporary art museum.

"Your house has a simple form / Whether dwarfed or giant / There are no curtains on the windows / It is an empty house!" Necatigil penned for the opening stanza of *Houses*, rhyming every second line in direct, playful Turkish. Riverrun stocks a plain edition of Necatigil's poetry. Aytekin's book is the eighth edition of the Norgunk series, *Open Writing* (in Turkish, *Aç Yazı*). It includes his original poems, articles, as well as drawings and paintings.

For his Arter exhibition, which disappeared from the storefront gallery on the city's most popular pedestrian drag, his works were curated by Eda Berkmen under the title, *Empty House*. It chronicled a variety of recurrent motifs in his art practice. Many of his transparent colors, technical alterations and architectural lines are apparent in his present show, *Coming Attractions*.

For its first month, *Coming Attractions* was shown below an exhibition of three videos by Turkey's preeminent contemporary sculptor and installation artist, Ayşe Erkmen, who recalled her works, *Chambal* (1999), *Deutsch Bahn* (2002) and *Level 2* (2006). Aytekin adores Erkmen, though sees no correlation between his art and hers. Instead, he maintains respect for her as a fellow student in the sculpture department at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. He hails from the painting department.

Reflecting on his school years, Aytekin remembered how Erkmen was concerned with conceptual frameworks from the start, a quality that he has always admired, closely following her prolific career. He shares an affinity for integrating and transcending exhibition spaces as a natural extension to his artwork. *Coming Attractions* invites the footsore and curious milling about downtown Istanbul into an abstraction of the quintessential modern experience that is going to the cinema.

A week after *Empty House* opened at Arter in March of 2018, headlines peaked over controversies led by Steven Spielberg, who feared the demise of theater-going for new cinema. The meteoric rise of Netflix films were seizing the classic limelight of the Academy Awards from the box office to the kitchen table. In the imaginative hands of Aytekin, the anachronistic adverts and popular attractions of the movie house are reanimated with vibrant twists of his rich palette and his knack for multifaceted, boundary-dissolving installations.

With geometric precision, his painting has an almost neon fluorescence, while conveying the rustic, faded charm of a country clapboard house lathered with reds, blues and yellows that combine the tonal qualities of natural pigment with an electric charge. As three Erkmen videos played on repeat above, the Bunker echoed with the sounds of the motion picture industry. *Chambal* (1999) was an adaptation of Leo the Lion, whose roar has prefaced most MGM films.

Downstairs, instead of a hallway leading to seats in front of a projection screen, Aytekin installed a single, wooden chair facing a wall tacked with loose, unframed series of works based on the profiles of characters in the film, *Time to Love* (in Turkish, *Sevmek Zamanı*, 1965) by the Turkish filmmaker Metin Erksan.

Riverrun is the child of film lovers. Aytekin saw a cinematheque when he came to arrange his latest pieces for the exhibition, which would express his art practice as a whole, from the individual objects to the concepts that conceived them and the space that contextualizes them in light, room, and conversation. He walked from the street into the cafe and saw the photograph of a work by the Palestinian multimedia artist Mona Hatoum, titled *Present Tense* (1996), pasted on the wall next to menu items stuck to a backboard with magnets.

Aytekin has tactile vision. The placement of his works followed suit with business as usual at Riverrun. His conceptual self-curation aligns with the fleeting nature of a temporary exhibition, drawing similarities to film previews and posters. Like when editing the moving image, excitement is cultivated when time is limited. It is clear that art galleries do not have the same mass appeal as movie theaters. The cliquish highbrow airs of white cubes are practically the opposite to sitting in the pitch-dark, eating popcorn for an audiovisual romp of theater.

*Coming Attractions* is a step toward reframing a persistent and universal dialogue about the challenges of engaging public interest in cultural sites. In the process, Aytekin seeks to instill mindfulness for inhabiting impermanent spaces, an apt analogy for planetary existence. The title

metaphor of his exhibition speaks to the essential criticism of conceptualism in art, which defends itself behind terms like "process-based," yet from certain angles may not be different than an advertisement for a Hollywood film invested in the sensation of previews over the enduring quality of the film.

A temporary exhibition is a physical act, as are film screenings. They open and close. Aytekin quotes the golden age of film production in the 1960s, when posters were frequently replaced, later epitomized by the seasonal construction of open-air cinemas. He relates these themes to his early series, *Temple Paintings* (2003-2004), exhibited at *Empty House*, which depicted the tabernacle, a portable dwelling for Yahweh on earth.

April 18, 11:28 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Dancing

A funny thing happened at Zilberman Gallery one April evening. A tight-knit crowd of viewers and ears stood in the presence of Zeynep Kayan and Clotilde Scordia, who wrote the erudite text of the exhibition catalog that was launched that evening. Scordia had flown to Istanbul from Paris to speak to the small gathering.

She exuded the intuitive grace of youth that is not unlike beginner's luck, and with a precocious attitude guided a chorus of thinkers to approach the intangible material, its visual motifs and transformative concepts. Through a variety of moving and still images, Kayan conjured a puzzling, cerebral tonic. At one point, a representative from the gallery stepped forward and asked Scordia a number of questions that directly referenced her text.

Scordia had integrated a term from French art history that does not translate well into English, "mise en abyme," meaning to place a copy of an image within itself, a self-referencing technique known to metafiction.

The audience orbited about the impromptu conversation between Scordia and Kayan in the main gallery. Questions floated from one piece to the next. A woman held up her chin with a fist of knotted fingers, deliberating with a refined air. A younger man shifted his weight, crossing his legs as he threw back one end of his fashionable scarf. The demographic range was broad.

What was not entirely clear was whether the conversation had changed its focus from the art to the text. In the guise of a catalog essay, it appeared that the piece of writing initially tasked to respond to the work of the artist took on a life of its own. Its apt reflections snuck past the author even, and the curators, before leaping into the collective consciousness, exemplifying an unprecedented degree of literary merit and critical breadth spanning not only the subject that inspired its publication, but towards a reinvention of language.

It was a typical Friday night in Istanbul, energetic as the weekend hubbub spiked along İstiklal Avenue where the prominent gallerist Moiz Zilberman was celebrating the tenth anniversary of his two exhibition spaces at Mısır Apartment, an elegant, multi-venue Ottoman-era building named after the Arabic word for Egypt. In 2016, he opened an annex in Berlin's Charlottenburg district, where the show, *Habituation* by Selçuk Artut had recently closed, while highlights from its production would remain on display in Istanbul.

"Equally mixed, white and black give birth to grey, which is the color we see when we close our eyes and also the first color human beings perceive when they are born. Apart from the grayness that appeared in Renaissance painting, grey only appears in an efficient and long-term way in art history with the advent of photography at the end of the 19th century," wrote Scordia.

From the auto-chromes that appeared in the first days of the 20th century to the 1950s and 1960s, color photography was considered unfaithful to reality, colors being deemed as imprecise and fake.

The art writer Jarret Earnest introduced his book of interviews with the most seasoned hands in the trade, titled *What It Means To Write About Art* (2016), with the proclamation that "writing criticism is a craft that contributes palpably to our shared world... that critics have more in common with artists themselves than with the reactionary hacks of popular imagination."

In his intrepid research with famous poets, novelists, essayists, and historians who wrote about art for an average of three decades to subsist and mature, he affirms: "Every critic is in some essential way self-made."

While the majority of readers may insist that a critic, or even an art writer or historian merely responds to creative work after the fact, Earnest defends a more complex analysis. Writing, regardless of its topic, has the capacity to assume a greater profile than that afforded by the traditional compartmentalization of subject matters and academic or artistic disciplines.

Enter contemporary literature. Equally, art is oftentimes thoroughly immersed and responsive to the critical milieu. In a like-minded spirit, Kayan is inspired not by text, but performance, specially *Accumulation* (1971) by Trisha Brown. The artistic genealogy is clear in her self-directed one-woman shows. That a vision spirals out from a single movement yet constantly returns to its essential points is common to the choreography of Brown and the performative video art of Kayan, who executes her vision through curated screenshots drawn from the timed looping of her videos.

She cuts a sheet of paper in half, hangs a coat and catches it before it falls, and balances a flat board above her head while placing a second one between her and the camera. *Temporary Sameness* has a similar edge to the action images she created from a temporary studio in Berlin for the winter group show at Zilberman, titled, *An Exile on Earth*, where Kayan captured emotional metaphors of the refugee experience with startling relevance.

For art lovers and instant gratifiers out for a surface-level experience to please the senses, *Temporary Sameness* is not ideal. The exhibition features her latest series. Most works have a grainy, low-quality that might be typecast in the vein of abstract art appreciation. The show is not an exercise in aesthetics. Its black-and-white spectrums are mute and ambiguous. Frequently, people who see the art of Kayan confuse her with the generation of early video artists from the 1970s for example. Kayan was born in 1986. She represents a generation who came of age before rampant social media addiction hijacked adolescence.

*Temporary Sameness* strikes a chord of sincerity, innocent and searching. Kayan is personable too, with her quirks of perception, repetition, how she handles props and obscures her identity. The equivalent in music galvanized popular recording with lo-fi returning mainstream

perfectionism back to the scratchy instrumental hip-hop of the 1990s. One looping video shown immediately across from the gallery entrance has Kayan reaching through her frame out of a softer focus, into to a rectangular area at its center which is sharper. She is grasping for an object in the post-real void.

The trans-media work of Kayan dialogues with space and its opposite, revealing the emptiness of barriers and the constructs of vacancy. She animates, tests and merges the limits of both virtual and physical manifestation. She has an uncanny sense for penetrating the invisible and flickering lines where the expanding and contracting digital world pervades into the palpable impasses of earthly existence.

These distinctions are blurring with the advent of hyper-realistic liquid crystal displays (LCD), face and voice recognition, artificial intelligence, fingerprint touch, deep learning, and the list continues far beyond authorized public knowledge. Out of sight, out of mind, the proverb goes. It is an apt metaphor for *Temporary Sameness*.

April 25, 6:42 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Distance

In the last year, multiple solo show debuts in Turkey have appeared at The Pill featuring Francophone artists from abroad whose art makes direct social proclamations about the legacy of Eurocentric racism and other criticisms of art history. Raphael Barontini drew from his Caribbean roots to rephrase the visual vocabulary of white male portraiture, replacing its effrontery with the upright gaze of African profiles and diaspora motifs.

Apolonia Sokol quoted European painters Ferdinand Holler and Henry Fuseli, reanimating classical oil painting with the vivacity of her youthful inspiration to join bodies with the prevailing multiethnic mix. Also pertinent is Soufiane Ababri, who has intrigued by using Anatolian wrestling as a metaphor for male domination, which crept into his singular approach to drawing as fine art, a trail that he has blazed despite academia and placed into the hands of daring collectors.

The paintings of Mireille Blanc take a step back from immediate social import. They are, like the urban geography of The Pill, more removed from the politics of art history. Blanc revises the act of seeing entirely. Like a philosophical conversation over wine, her paintings soften the focus of discrimination. Hers is a light touch, as beautiful as it is bewitching. With the finesse of uncontrived persuasion as natural as the change of seasons, *Spring* sublimates objectivity by reintroducing imagination into the act of identification, be it of a person, a thing or both.

The quality of color in the paint of Mireille Blanc is appetizing. Her raw, visceral palette is edible to the eye, toward a rediscovery of the homophonic etymology of palate. In one of her more vibrant works, the abstract and the figurative coexist. A spinning top of a white-hemmed, crimson ball gown is backgrounded by a snowy cloud of grays. And where the elegant, fictive dress would begin to assume a human form, she swathes a lucid chorus of blues, yellows and greens with uninhibited brushstrokes.

Tastefully indulgent in milky hues and dappled textures, Blanc teases abstraction from representation, and vice versa. Many of her paintings for *Spring* are figurative. The tricolored sweater and buttoned overalls of a child are framed from chin to chest, slicing the depiction off with the tiniest sliver of red at the lower lip. A liberal dousing of spattered white adds a metafictional twist to her magical realism. The sense of sight is the travel partner of illusion.

One of her more accomplished, large-scale works looks down at a tangled bunch of grapes balancing on the leg of a lone sitter whose paint-stained, ribbed pants scream autobiographical. The play of silhouetted fruit contrasts with the beams of bleached light that shoot across their skin and beneath the faceless figure. She also did not picture the face a dreadlocked figure seated in a wooden chair, but held a most unique perspective that is at once completely familiar.

In her approximation to human portraiture, Blanc blurs distinctions between the outsider and insider with a sincere, precious sentiment. Her eccentric compositions have the ability to convey

emotions of solitude, heightened by the contrasts of living in an age of total connectivity. An individual can feel like a complete stranger, even to themselves, in private. Artists empathize because they work from the behind the curtains of consciousness.

Seyrantepe is a hike from the center of Istanbul, especially for art-goers who have ample opportunity to enjoy aesthetic and conceptual saturation in Beyoğlu, where most galleries and museums are located nearer to the shimmering turquoise of the Bosphorus. But the young, emerging curator Melike Bayık has given cause for urban explorers to descend through the subterranean corridors of the metro system and rise on Thracian ground.

ADAS (Architecture Design Art Space) is the destination point. The sleek establishment is essentially hidden within a hive of side streets in a post-industrial, working-class neighborhood. But its stylized storefront is fit for uptown culture. And inside, the collection and its curation is impressive. Bayık studied in the arts management department at Yeditepe University. Her thesis was on public space in Turkey and curatorial projects. She is inspired by the ideas of Michel Foucault, and draws from her experience of working with Marcus Graf as his associate curator for nearly six years.

Bayık has prepared a relevant show in dialogue with contemporary trends in the rarefied world of Turkish art and its history. ADAS, and The Pill are peculiarly equipped to redraw the relationship between residential and cultural space in Istanbul, broadening and cultivating the standards and demographics of art appreciation. Whereas the richly unique colors and angles in the paintings of Blanc might transcend favoritism of either abstraction or representation as mutually exclusive, the group show by Bayık, titled *Standart*, decentralizes Istanbul's art world into unconventional public spaces.

*Standart* is the first show that Bayık curated. ADAS is run by collector Ömer Özyürek, whose proletarian egalitarianism is evident. He can be seen at openings carrying rubbish out to the street in between bursts of hobnobbing. The modest persona of Özyürek and the works at *Standart* maintain a certain subtle continuity.

The mixed media painter İhsan Oturmak dramatized the emotional uniformity of schoolchildren with his canvas, *Innovation II* (2013). Oturmak contrasts darker and lighter hues to bring out the enigmatic gloom of childhood under the provincial contexts of obedience and authority. His palette accents darkness where Blanc's work turned pale. *Innovation II* adapts the downcast stoicism of girls and boys posing for an official class photograph in Ankara. In likeminded fashion, the draftsman Yuşa Yalçıntaş reflects on his trial of uniformed primary education in Turkey's heartlands.

*Audition* (2019) by Yalçıntaş is on display near the entrance to ADAS for *Standart*. He is an artist in the vein of visionary surrealism, engaging with the image-languages of exotic cultures as diverse as Kabbalah and shamanism. Yet, he has a precocious understanding for the inherent dimension of archaic wisdom in human psychology. He conveys Jungian visualizations through

meticulous drawings that relay creative narratives and storyboards of dream logic, single-page graphic novels illuminating Freud's title concept, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). The two-level exhibition space at ADAS turns upward to reveal examples of post-literate textual criticism in contemporary Turkish visual art.

The installation, *Self Defence* (2015), and a fine art print, *Constitutive Lines* (2015) by the Frankfurt-based artist duo Özlem Günyol and Mustafa Kunt blend for a stiff tonic with the video installation, *I Love You 301* (2007) by Ferhat Özgür.

May 2, 11:42 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Worker

The map is not true. After every sharpshooting tech advance delivered via satellite from Silicon Valley, an information fallout prevails behind the ancient walls of Constantine, in the heart of Istanbul's old castle fortress. Once inside the lost Roman city, time and space work in mysterious ways. Gürün Han, built in 1954, is a relic of a forgotten era. Its textile workers still hang by a thread and live on a shoestring. Its faded, pale concrete exterior is neighbored by an unexceptional minaret. A bit more of the chipped, discolored paint falls off five times a day.

The familiar workaday must of the Han opens into a commercial factory, a mall of workshops where wholesalers make, package and repair the damaged national product. Up an antiquated elevator to floor seven, Mike Nelson has reconvened his past lives in the megalopolis where people disappear in its polluted haze and return half-human, half-artist. His installation, *PROJEKTÖR* fleshes out the ongoing, narrative experiment of modernity across sixteen rooms.

The audiovisual multimedia at *PROJEKTÖR* gives a weary first impression, with its sideways taxi cams stereotyping the foreign, outsider perspective that weighs heavily on Istanbul and its cultural self-determination. What was once New Rome is now in the middle of a sprawling, global capital struggling to carry a multiplex of historical burdens, including an extractive tourism industry and other tropes that disassociate workers, the religious and the intelligentsia from the expatriates, immigrants and refugees of the international community.

*PROJEKTÖR* seeks to unite haberdashers and cobblers with cineastes and intellectuals, in the process pouring salt on the wounds that divide them. A man walked into one of the rooms where the videos of Nelson festered in the spider web light. He wondered aloud to his entourage of fellow laborers why the frame had not been righted. On the glass wall, black lettering remained to advertise quality shirts. Nelson designed to leave the rooms he occupied unaltered, dust and all. Many had not been cracked open for decades.

Nelson, in his unmistakable denim, exudes a carpenter's aesthetic. Arguably, his videos are keen for messaging the medium in the spirit of Marshall McLuhan, who once said: "First we build the tools, then they build us." Representation aside, the feat of having resuscitated a most wacky outfit of early projectors is notable. But for anyone not running a vintage shop or obsessing over outmoded videography, the point is blindingly out of focus.

*PROJEKTÖR* relays the puzzling temptations of biennial adventurism. Nelson participated in Istanbul's in 2003 and on behalf of Britain in Venice's in 2011, so he is used to treading that daring line, the pariah concept in modernism, asking what is art, and what is not art. In the context of art's modernization, Gürün Han poses a melange of challenges and opportunities to both merge and distend these concepts into a seamless, "site-aware" experience.

There are rooms at Gürün Han open for the run of Protocinema's commission that, to the naked eye, are entirely devoid of any resemblance to artwork. Bathed in demonic, red light,

construction materials are strewn about for a derelict ambiance out of a horror film, recalling the torture scenes of political thrillers. Not a word identifies the inclusion or exclusion of these sites. The train wreck facade of modernity has run its course, returned to its source disillusion in the hands of a workforce without work, as art without purpose.

Across the Golden Horn in the shamelessly gentrified district of Karaköy, the classic essay, *Against Interpretation* (1966) by Susan Sontag, is perched at FiLBooks, a literary cafe specializing in publishers of photography. "From now to the end of consciousness, we are stuck with the task of defending art," she wrote to the lasting echo of her voice as a luminary of modern thought. "To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings.’"

The discord of holy text and polytheistic myth from rational interpretation is lucidly explained by Sontag, whose argument has matured with age in the context of an installation like *PROJEKTÖR*. It requires an obscure, connoisseur's knowledge of contemporary art not just to enjoy the rough content and hard-earned concepts, but also just to be what it is.

Such mental preparations are a tall order for the tired, hunched man wearing what he sells, out to straighten his back on his tea break with a crumpled, glossy press release in one hand, scratching his scalp with the other before sauntering off, nothing gained, nothing lost, except for a few minutes. His presence locates an enduring wisdom, namely that the art of interpretation is not visual art. Its essence is more like literary criticism, the meaning gleaned from a cerebrally abstract, post-visual anti-art.

The worker entered early modern art history as an image through which to express realism with a social import. The empiricism was a persuasive rallying cry to human unity despite the barriers of national histories, languages and territories. The task of contemporary modern artists like Nelson in cahoots with Protocinema is to invite the worker to become a spectator, even critic.

As a result, art will further its capacity to dialogue with manufacture, towards a reciprocity of invention and industry. An installation like *PROJEKTÖR* begs the question of whether art is really the ideal way to achieve this.

Gloomy rooms surround the centerpiece of *PROJEKTÖR*, a kind of post-consumerist hut. Its interior is designed like the hideout of a Muslim ascetic or political refugee. As the nucleus of the installation, it is lit from within, constructed of boxes on metal stilts. Together with faceless taxicab drivers, Nelson's central work comes off as Orientalist at worst and politically muddled at best with its Arabic calligraphy, political cartoons, and advertising imprints.

Inside the fort of boxes, a book with Atatürk on the cover has been left closed, its spine taped from wear. There is a portrait on the wall of a bald, bearded man. A transistor radio spouts white noise dangling from the ceiling. Next to it, a birdcage hangs above a horse figurine, evidence of a



new generation born in isolation. The piece relays a sense of remoteness and abandonment from the world.

The contrasts from dark red to spotlight white are eerie, conjuring the unsettling specter of an outcast at the edge of modernity. The rebel, the other, the worker, the opposition strikes fear into the heart of civilization, a conflict of paradigms that defines the classist elitism of contemporary art. But the only place light enough to read at *PROJEKTÖR* is inside the fort of decommissioned boxes. It is only there where education is possible, the most potent catalyst for social change. Much of the rest of the seventh floor at Gürün Han is abandoned, but until the end of the show, it may feel like someone previously unseen had been there for a long time.

May 9, 11:41 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Woodcutter

Burcu Erden sculpts the struggle of life out of dead trees. The stone tile floors of her compact studio cool the cavernous air. Stalagmites of anthropomorphic, wooden sculpture rise to lifelike heights. Her workspace is a practical hole-in-the-wall not far from the shores of the Golden Horn, about halfway up the inlet a short walk behind Kadir Has University.

Erden, born in 1986, shapes ideas out of forests of possibility. She uses a chainsaw to redefine fir and beech wood from Düzce into artifacts of contemporary culture. But she does not pander to the artless conceptualism of trends that slash enduring thought like prices. A single sculpture may take her two months to two weeks to complete. Unlike many contemporary sculptors who pay for assistants and ready-mades, she is alone with the mass and the void.

Inside her studio, the dust has settled in between major exhibitions, but her mind buzzes on with the insights she has gained by seeing her works through to the final cut. The fruits of her labor are as dramatic as they are sharp. She casts archetypes out of deciduous cylinders with an evergreen poise.

Roughly hewn, her seven sculptures are modeled after an equal number of miniature sculptures cast from bronze. A series of fourteen drawings give context to her visualizations and the process by which she moves between sculpture and wooden reliefs. Preparing to execute a new piece, she draws lines onto the wood with black acrylic after her sketches. What remains is a burnt aesthetic.

She develops her investigative mind as a research assistant in the Sculpture Department at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Her first solo show, *Ashes of Tomorrow*, was organized in 2018 by the university for a ten-day run at Tophane-i Amire Culture and Arts Center. She thinks of her current show at Art On as more like her actual solo debut.

Behind nontransparent windows, Erden cannot see the streets outside of her studio as they thin and slope up and inward from the waterfront. Many of the oldest wooden homes have collapsed from disuse. It is a district of lost causes with a history of people and places disappeared and silenced, left to the pages of storied records, piled onto the incalculable annals of abandonment and revitalization in the Turkish megalopolis.

Mahogany planks of taverns once famed on the inlet shore are increasingly overshadowed by the polished marble of mosques on the hills above. That a sculptor of raw wood has emerged in the upper crust of the contemporary art scene from the heart of one of Istanbul's most contrasting, mixed quarters exemplifies the nature of cultural diversity in the city.

Wood, once the commonest material for residential construction in Istanbul, has become a source of gentrification gold for architectural renewal projects that adapt the bygone facades of old Rum dwellings. And in the hands of Erden, it is an aptly situated medium for fine art. When asked

about her choice of material, she evades direct association with traditionalism solely based on using wood.

"Even in the academy, they will find these sculptures unfinished, but actually I think it's totally finished. It's a big decision for me because I'm a young sculptor," Erden said during a studio visit a week before the opening of her show in April.

I usually work with clay, and the texture is close. I like fresh textures.

She is invigorated by the hum of the electrical saw. Her work is intimidating with its muscular forms, as the grit of a modern dancer bursting to upstage competition and race hearts. Her works assume the shape of faceless humanoid figures, without extremities. The pieces are brutalist evocations steeped in a nonspecific, naturalistic mythic expressionism.

Figurative contours break through abstraction from the rectangular, block of the foundation. They are not pedestals but the mass that is an essential part of the sculpture. Up from the monolithic void, unshapely creatures rise like eyeless forest gnomes empowered by a surge of resistance in confrontation with the rigidity of embodiment, rooted in a vital, unseen dynamism.

All of her pieces are untitled. They simply fall under, *Calling for the Mass*. Two are reminiscent of one of the most famous sculptures in art history, *The Thinker* (1904) by Auguste Rodin. The likeness of a burly man crouches low, one knee touching his neck. What might be his hand is an amorphous fan infused into the foundation. The angular cubism of her reliefs recall the Picasso painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907), and the African art that inspired him.

"They look like the human body, but actually they are also something different. It is mass. This is a sculpture, it's not a human sculpture," said Erden, welcoming at her sawdust studio while surrounded by her latest work displayed at *Calling for the Mass*.

The crouching position is primitive. It is the starting point. My aim is to go far from human anatomy. The most important thing in my sculptures is abstraction. The aim is sculpture.

Where certain of her works move deeper into abstraction, further obscuring human form, they have a prismatic character, abounding in right angles. Art On installed one of her more abstract works on the uppermost floor of its loft gallery a few doors down from Pera Museum. The section of lumped wood retains the distinct qualities of a human being leaping upward and in mid-air, with arms crossed.

There is a mystic energy in her work, conjuring the physical saga of biological evolution from the perspective of the body. From the trees, humanity swung down to walk aright. Now that the trees are supplanted, cleaved rootless and plucked bald, the reflection of humankind is wavering unrecognizably on the surface of the imagination. Humankind is becoming abstract from the world, and vice versa as biodiversity is increasingly annihilated.

Another work at Art On across from the bronze models and monochrome sketches captures the effect of revolving bodily movement, its apish frame curled into itself. Without eyes to look into the soul, and lacking hands by which to empathize with the gentle, more vulnerable aspects of animal existence, her works are triumphant visions of pure life, being itself.

In the same way that she handles a chainsaw with a refined technique, her sculptures express the dual harmony of toughness and fragility. Because of her success representing these motifs viscerally, her abstract figures are cracking open to let the light in, shot through with the soul of substance, like the mass of the void. And she calls for its creative contradictions with a confident, finishing touch.

May 15, 12:19 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Research

It was the summer of 1924, and the waves of Capri roared like the decade. The island off the Neapolitan coast was host to a traveling circus of avant-garde minds out for a respite from heady northern climes where the spirits of revolution were sleepless as nighthawks. Asja Lacis had built her political reputation and artistic momentum in Germany with Fritz Lang, Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator as a representative of the successful communist revolution in Russia.

She was a Baltic belle when photographed in her prime, donning a wide-brimmed sun hat, the symmetrical lines of her nose and lips delicately shading the contours of her supple face. For the German Jewish culture critic Walter Benjamin, who she met during that season of love in Italy, her fiery, lifelong dedication to work over experience, and her commitment to universal justice beyond ageism would grant him an eternal muse.

Brinkmanis discovered Lacis (pronounced Lah-tsis), as most would, reading Benjamin, particularly his flaneur anthem, *One Way Street* (1928) one of only two books by him published during his lifetime, and which he dedicated to Lacis. To him, the conceptual *One Way Street* is, endearingly, "Asja Lacis Street," as she "engineered" it, he wrote. With one of his classic turns of phrase, Benjamin explained that she "cut it through" him.

As a fellow compatriot from Riga, tracing her literary contribution political drama theory, Brinkmanis found the definitive memoir by Asja Lacis, titled, *Professional Revolutionary*, published to coincide with her eightieth birthday in 1971. She recalled completing her final exams at age twenty-six during the storming of the Winter Palace in Petrograd (modern-day St. Petersburg) as "bullets whizzed" over her head and the communists re-established headquarters in Moscow.

In the midst of armed conflict, Lacis took up the revolutionary struggle for justice through intellectual work. While at the Latvian refugee school in Petrograd, she read the proclamation, "To the People, To the People" signed by Lenin. It turned her into a communist. As a student of theater, the bloody Bolshevik spring was a feast of material and inspiration.

Lacis witnessed mass spectacles staged by the *Theater of October*, including a re-enactment of the Winter Palace storming in 1920, and gleaned collegial innovations from the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. The running idea was that theater, as a coalition of working artists, could instill revolutionary principles for a semi-literate public long initiated in the mimesis of work and the military. But she would start small, with children.

Early communists in Russia demanded the mass and immediate upheaval of every medium of social exchange. Revolutionary theater was akin to the mural, famously utilized by the communist painter Diego Rivera. It was pedagogical and entertaining at once. Inculcated in the experimental dramatic arts of Russia and Germany with leading intellectuals, Lacis would arguably enter the history of ideas when she wrote with Benjamin, the reputed last intellectual.

Lacis and Benjamin shifted a paradigm of dramatic theory, enumerating a class of theatrical experimentation that outlived them and spread throughout the world. Beginning with the co-written essay, "Naples" (1925), coining the concepts of "porosity" and "constellation," and later Benjamin's *Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater* (1928), her productions earned a theoretical basis. They had become tried and true models for revolutionary practice.

But until regaining notoriety in Germany in the 1960s, a patriarchal fog was soon cast over her legacy. The Frankfurt School demeaned her as the "Bolshevik girlfriend," and her work on "Naples" with Benjamin went uncredited in his 1955 collection of writings. If not for the literary scholarship of German critic Hildegard Brenner, her name might have disappeared from the European canon of critical twentieth-century literature.

In 1975, author Patty Lee Parmalee reviewed Brenner's book on Lacis, loosely translated *Revolutionary at Work* (1971), for the *New German Critique*, in which she described her as the "extremely important missing link" between early Soviet thespians and the Weimar Republic's revolutionaries. Lacis was still alive when Parmalee described her as the originator of "theater therapy for juvenile delinquent war orphans".

Previously exhibiting his research at the Latvian National Library in Riga in 2019 and at Documenta14 in Kassel in 2017, Brinkmanis saw a special relevance for his work in Istanbul, where refugee children of the Syrian civil war increasingly roamed the streets, acting out undirected backlashes after the traumas they survived. He planned the show with AVTO while observing history repeat itself according to the prescience of Lacis, at the same time gaining a unique reputation as an emerging pioneer of the research exhibition.

AVTO is pedagogical by design. Its atypical house style for exhibitions activates the underground space as a nexus for alternative thinkers to self-educate toward direct action by cultivating nonconformist artistic movements in a contemporary, pro-youth fashion. *Signals from Another World: Asja Lacis and Children's Theater* invites the public to reweave the threads of inquiry that prompted Lacis to abandon an established theater career for more radical directions.

Benjamin, one of the most critical writers in history, shed his cerebral objectivity to join her as comrades, with pens for arms, ink for ammunition, tasked to return the war term of the "theater" to its place in the popular revolution. It was Lacis who secured Benjamin passage to Russia, culminating in his renowned *Moscow Diary*. And he noted that the children in her plays were acting out, "signals from another world," pointing to life in a state of permanent revolution.

"For the true observer, however, and this is the starting point of education, every childhood action and gesture becomes a signal," Benjamin wrote, redrafting *Program for a Proletarian Children's Theater* following criticism of his difficult prose.

Not so much a signal of the unconscious, of latent processes, repressions, or censorship (as the psychologists would like to think), but a signal from another world, in which the child lives and commands.

The work of Lacis foreshadows the problems of twenty-first century media literacy, a crisis of saturated consciousness foretold by Aldous Huxley. She was concerned with the death of reason from overexposure and made moves to counter its sensual glut of capitalist materialism that had not yet dominated the globe, opening one of the first cinemas for children in Moscow. She was a leader among her generation not because she looked up to those who came before, but because she followed those who would come after.

May 22, 2:00 PM  
Paris, France

## Earthly

Nature is taken for granted. Its immediacy is absolute as to render abstraction void. But it is a concept, a mere word to encapsulate a phenomenon so completely encompassing that it can never be pinpointed by any single, exclusive source. There, it differs from monotheism.

Biology is of secondary importance to the hard sciences. Observing life is a kaleidoscopic adventure into the pitfalls of anomalies and exceptions to broken rules. In science, art and religion, nature is the mythical personification of the universal mother matrix of material, wielding the double-edged sword of life's diversity and death's climate.

To speak of nature as a realm of inquiry without reference to human perspective is as dramatic a severance as the separation of mind from body, reinforcing the essential contradiction between experience and consciousness in a universe that is only known because it is sensed. To objectify nature is an act of mutual exclusion destructive to life.

Both as reflected in history, with the legacy of colonialism, and from an ideological viewpoint, to capture nature, to possess it purely as an externality, is to force people out. Naturalism implies an existential confrontation with the interdependent nature of reality. It could be argued that the cultural and technological institutions that have advanced to measure trends toward ecocide have also caused its unavoidable threat.

To see the world is, arguably, to back away from it, to claim independence from its sway in the name of patriarchal, anthropocentric cultivation. Nature alludes to superficial beauty for societies couched behind the walls of agricultural urbanization. For subsistence land defenders, nature is constantly in heat. She gives birth to food, and screams out in pain with generous, unconditional love.

Beyond conceptualism, the vicissitudes of mass, mortal change in the human world mirrors the greater planetary forces of chaos and power. The scheme of civilization is to instigate control over the environment, to find the loopholes of energy that would permit Dionysian revelry for all time. As the globe reels from the overburdens of fossil fuel industrialism, an unpeopled valley, an old tree, and an alluring rainforest set the stage for a welcome, thoughtful reconsideration of nature as the integrated wholeness of humanity with its life.

Ali Akay, a prominent Sorbonne-educated translator of French philosophy into Turkish, locates the art practice of Elmas Deniz between irony and reverence. At the back of Açıkecran (Open Screen) in Teşvikiye, under the dim shade of three screening rooms surrounded by a cooling bank lobby, *Human-less* (2015) runs its six minutes and eleven seconds of stunning footage through a remote mountain valley in North Ossetia-Alania, one of Russia's most pristine, untouched wildernesses.



When the finicky equipment is fully functioning at Açıkecran, the score by Can Candan carpets a soothing, magic ride over the geological masterpiece of the highland. Like the hearty lungs of a lone climber resting atop the summited peak, synth pads expand and contract over the crystalline lens that captures flowing water and tree-line scree with a light, surface touch.

Filmed in the Caucasus Mountains with a state-of-the-art drone camera, the video was commissioned for the ALANICA International Symposium in Vladikavkaz in March 2015, and departing from its stunning aerial cinematography, the work examines the superimposition of human omnipresence. At once, the untrammelled riverine meadows sparkle, yet hint at what was lost throughout the world.

With her characteristically inventive incorporation of text into her multidisciplinary visual art, Deniz adds a flickering computer warning: "you are not a bird" in Turkish and English near the finale as the panning shot descends back from the heights where its glory is marred by the sharp, mechanical movements of the frame. It is the beginning of the end for the land's virginity. And before fading out to black, the vantage point appears as from human eye-level.

*Human-less* is a wise place to start thematically digesting the three-video exhibition, titled, *Integration with Nature*, translated into English from the Turkish, *Doğa ile Bütünleşmek*, which can be reread as "communing with nature". The root of the verb indicates wholeness. That said, the video art of Deniz is approachable, inviting as an expansive, vibrant ecology, however set with gently refracted pearls of conceptual and historical research.

It was a cold, late winter day in 2014 when Deniz found a six hundred-year-old tree leaning off the side of a thin, gravelly road on royal property outside of Stockholm. Its boughs were bare, but heavy with the saga of a time spent on Earth unfathomable to a little person. The gothic, arboreal wonder had witnessed the seed of its host nation sprout and mature into an enviable Scandinavian state. Deniz had come to assess its worth. She was not strapped for kroner, commissioned by the International Artists Studio Program to produce an evergreen work.

*The Tree I Want to Buy* (2014) has the carefree resemblance of an indie film, like that of early Jarmusch, self-aware, unpretentious in its slack wandering to experiment with the absurdity of reason, far gone from centers of recognition with nothing more than plain style and a curious idea. She counts her cash and drops some bills after scrutinizing the product. Executing a blunt, social message requires personable tact to preserve the charm of art, particularly when echoing the tragic environmental effects of capitalist commodification.

Deniz reclines effervescent and witty on the sharp corners of the worldwide argument as national leaders fumble to address environmental catastrophe while the Anthropocene era gains increasing clout and the threat of global warming continues with cringe-worthy political theatrics. In response, she dances on eggshells. Her most recent video, *Made to be Seen* (2018) is a play on the language of advertisements. With a deadpan voiceover by Lara Ögel, the evocative allure of the exotic jungle near Kandy is humanized in the worst sense of the term.

While the space at Açıkekran does not have the amiable ambiance of a popular, neighborhood gallery, the corporate vibe offers a blank slate, counterintuitively setting the mood for a clear exposition of contrasts. Deniz animates that most pivotal of human questions with tasteful provocation, balancing distinctions between culture and nature with the eye of a prehistoric painter fleshing out a sooty mural of predators.

*The Allegory of the Cave*, written by Plato in 517 BCE, teaches how provincial minds are unable to understand the seer who scatters the symbols and shadows of forms with knowledge gained by direct perception. In her videos, Deniz returns to the cave of worldly urban society having seen nature, and shows that it is just another cunning, human artifice. The trick is I.

May 31, 3:21 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Epitaph

Oral legend follows a rare piece of silver-embroidered silk. Its figurative stitch is decorated with gold-plated metal to depict, *Lamentation upon the Grave*, where Jesus rests in peace under his family of saints. It is an epitaph cover from Agios Athanasios Cathedral, the backbone of religious observance in the landlocked, lakeside mountain town in northwestern Greece.

The solemn faces and exposed skin of the icon are painted in high relief techniques on cutouts of canvas. The golden embroidery portrays the heavy folds of ancient, ceremonial clothing with striking luminosity. Vegetal motifs embellished the Greek calligraphy of the "dismissal hymn" (apolytkion), which praises Joseph for taking down the body of his prophetic son from the cross for a proper burial, and not without a liberal use of perfume.

It is said that the mythical funerary veil was a donation, gifted by believers when the Zosimas brothers financed the rebuilding of the Ioannina cathedral in 1830. By that time, Ioannina was the undisputed regional heart of secular education in Greece, cultivating a literary renaissance. In fact, in her book, *The Muslim Bonaparte*, historian K.E. Fleming wrote of one gymnasium in Ioannina established by the Zosimas brothers as early as 1769 which educated not only Greeks, but also Muslims and Orthodox Albanians.

In the mid-1700s, the local Ioanniote merchant Panagis Zosimas had six sons who went on to earn a fortune trading between Italy and Russia. The septet of philanthropists advanced Ioannina as the intellectual source of the Greek Enlightenment (1647-1830) during Ottoman rule, particularly with the opening of the Zosimaia school in 1820.

In the nineteenth century, Istanbul still bustled with perfectionists skilled in the textile crafts of the church. They managed workshops that stimulated the international economy, forming guilds whose proud apprentices strolled affluently along the Golden Horn speaking the Phanariot dialect of Greek on the inlet shorefront neighborhood now called Fener.

The currency of the day was prestige for Christian workers glorifying the church. A single embroidered piece of silk was interwoven with velvet, satin, silver, gold, foil, sequin, semiprecious stones and pearls. The finest work demanded around fifteen months. The price of epitaph covers was measured by its weight in gold. One was worth enough to buy a home in a fancy urban district on the Ionian coast of Greece.

Inside the Patriarchal Church of St. George, the central institution of Orthodox Christianity outside of Russia, there is an embroidered epitaph cover displayed in a glass case above the relic of St. Euphemia the Great Martyr. She was mauled by a lion in an arena in Chalcedon, present-day Kadıköy, for not sacrificing to Ares, the pagan Greek god of war. Her memory is linked with a miracle that clarified the singular Orthodox belief in the dual nature of Christ during the Fourth Ecumenical Council, preceding the Great Schism.

Beside the memorial tomb to St. Euphemia, close to a porticoed column rumored to have been taken from the site where Christ was flagellated, is one of the most prized possessions of Istanbul's sacred art heritage, an eleventh century mosaic of St. John the Baptist. The reverent atmosphere is tread by pilgrims from across the planet, who come to kiss the gleaming icons that are also woven artfully into ritual fabrics. Made with living fibers, examples from the nineteenth century represent some of the oldest extant textiles in the tradition.

The epitaph cover at the Patriarchal Church of St. George is markedly different from that which is exhibited in Ioannina, although they depict the same scene of the *Lamentation upon the Grave*, where Jesus has the air of a reclining buddha, his adorers crowding his bare body, shrouded in his serene passage from life. The piece in Istanbul is dyed along its bordering edge in royal Byzantine purple. Instead of the cross, Hagia Sophia beams upward on the glittering, gold horizon in its original form before it was festooned with Ottoman minarets.

There are three other epitaph covers displayed in Ioannina at the Silversmithing Museum, which opened in the newly renovated medieval castle walls of the Greek city in 2016. They were all made in workshops in Vienna. The oldest is dated to 1733. The minutest aspect of every baroque detail is breathtakingly restored to full vision. Beside each centerpiece, well-lit and flattened out behind plates of glass, is an interpretive touchscreen with points extrapolating on the technical details of the artwork.

Spiral wire is wound and twisted and metallic threads fastened in pairs to create the images and textures of belts, sleeves, halos, shrouds, loincloths, ointment jars and other features set with almond-shaped inlaid discs and a variety of foils and sequins to animate the look and feel, and also sacred symbolism of garments. The religious personages come to life on painted canvas, relaying facial inflections only communicable by a liquid medium. The result altogether is a pre-modern multimedia art form in the guise of a ritual object.

To provide greater cultural context, with a special appreciation for the divine taste of Ioannina's old business class and monastic orders, the exhibition includes a double-sided icon from the Church of the Dormition of Mary on the island of Ioannina, where the remote asceticism of the Orthodox practice has long taken root. The half with Jesus as the Man of Sorrows is ravaged by wear almost beyond recognition. Dating from 1794, the human likeness is visible due to a painstaking conservation process. But the imperfections have a lofty allure.

Yet another example of the endangered art of the embroidered epitaph cover exists in Istanbul. Not far from the Patriarchal Church of St. George, the Bulgarian St. Stephen Church, known as the "Iron Church," stands. Its prefabricated neo-Gothic metal structure was transported by ship from Vienna along the Danube River and Black Sea. In the early twentieth century, before the construction of a two-way highway along the Golden Horn, rowboats could moor in view of the stained glass facade that would reflect the turquoise sheen of the fish-filled waters below.

There are only four hundred and fifty Orthodox Bulgarians left in Istanbul, most having resided in Turkey for two generations since unrest in the Ottoman Balkans led to WWI, according to a 2017 study by Magdalena Elchinova of the New Bulgarian University. The waning community mirrors the twilight of traditions like the embroidered epitaph covers. One young Bulgarian Istanbul native named Alex oversees St. Stephen Church as part of a generation witnessing the loss of their history.

Under a wooden framework at St. Stephen, an embroidered epitaph cover is lain on the metaphorical tomb of Christ. Its royal purple background dye is touched with a distinctive red for the gold-fringed raiments of Mary, but her face, like the others, is artificial, even photocopied. It was made in Greece, gifted by a woman from Kastoria in the 1960s.

June 4, 11:06 PM  
Ioannina, Greece

## Little

The painter was at home, quick to reveal her origins from Massachusetts with all of the sarcasm of a true New Englander. It was Friday morning in New York City, where Ayşe Wilson has lived for the better part of her life as an artist. She was reflecting on her exhibition career in Istanbul, where she has been represented by Pg Art Gallery since 2007.

Wilson had finished her graduate studies and was working for Jeff Koons, an opportunity that she described as satisfactorily fleeting. As a Turkish-American woman, Wilson traveled to Istanbul a lot while growing up in Boston. Pırl Güleşçi Arıkonmaz was a friend of a neighbor of one of her cousins in Turkey. Her gallery, Pg, was looking for new artists. It was a match.

Not only was it her "first real gallery," as Wilson remembered, but Arıkonmaz was the "first real person" she worked with in a world defined by commercial exploitation and the pretense of fame. For over a decade, the feelings have been mutual, with Wilson growing up as an artist, and Arıkonmaz as a gallerist.

The New York Academy of Art attracted Wilson for its focus on the human figure. Its halls were steeped in the theory that if an artist can paint the human form, they can paint anything. Wilson roundly agrees, even if she understands artists who don't always want to paint it. For her, it sparked an enduring, and singular interest in classical training.

"Painting is something that really takes a long time to learn how to do. You have to spend a lot of time with yourself, to figure out how you want to do things. I've always found it very interesting to see how it's done. In the end you learn how to do things by yourself," she said.

Her first show at Pg, titled, *Swimmers*, investigated Apollonian and Dionysian contrasts. Five years passed between *Swimmers* and her second solo show at Pg in 2012, titled *when we were little* (2012). She returned to Istanbul for her opening in Tophane, and had started her own family, with two sons. *when we were little* touched on her life as a new mother, with special nostalgia for her childhood memories in Istanbul.

Wilson's father died when she was very young. He had cancer for years. She remembers feeling death all around her, growing up with the weight of sickness in the house. And what made it worse was that her parents didn't speak openly about it. They were scared to bring it up to their children, to express sadness. Tragedy hung in the air.

Also struggling to cope with her mother's mental illness, her early traumas developed into adult inspiration. She took her pain by the horns, a toreador with a brush, dancing before the bittersweet intensity of her primal gaze. In her delicate hands, she opens her eyes anew, as a girl seeing the world for the first time. Happiness comes with undertones of sadness.

With her sons approaching their teens, she consistently revisits the themes that are central to childhood on the cusp of adolescence. At some point, a child realizes that they can't go everywhere alone, that some places are dangerous. Human nature disillusions. Friends can be mean. These hard truths come with maturation in an imperfect, human world.

Her art is a reflection of her own mental and emotional state. She draws visual metaphors observing her children. She extracts the inner child within her using soft fibers dipped in paint, and like a ripening root vegetable, lifts her suppressed feelings from the turned soil of the mind. In her practice, painting implies the optimism of connection.

In comparison to *Swimmers*, her second solo show at Pg, *when we were little* captured more individualism in the childlike human figures that Wilson paints in plush colors, exuding prepubescent comforts. A character emerges from the fog of memory, and angelic, personifying the cherubim of youth.

"I feel like it was a physical space that we all had. Wherever it was, you had it. You had your first bedroom, your first garden you played in. It's a physical place, even if it changes and for everyone it's different. We can all share that," said Wilson.

Sometimes seeing art can really cheer you up.

*Little Friends* her third solo show at Pg, in 2015, was based on her readapting the "imprimatura" layer in classic painting. She studied the traditional discipline, pursuing an education in Florence after graduating from Wellesley College in 1991. Her work was compared to the Italian Renaissance master Fra Angelico, but she realized canonization wasn't for her.

While in Italy, drinking in the palatable tones of masterpieces, the psychological richness of its visual literacy, she reached a creative impasse and had an epiphany. She thinks of it like becoming a natural to her art. Some play instruments, others simply are not musical. Her clarity led to a new direction all her own.

In the shadow of Leonardo, Vermeer, Cezanne, Pollock, she was as curious as a child. She wanted to know how they did it, and so, started at the beginning, by learning the technical skills required of the "imprimatur" layer, in which blank, background surfaces are coated for a neutral ground that can then be lightened or darkened. She immersed her art in raw, fresh starts, departing from classicism where it begins on the canvas. Her recurrent, ethereal fleshy blues have been subject to criticism. When painting in the classical style, a blue-green undertone is applied to contrast flesh colors, adding volume, especially when painting light, pink flesh.

Her paintings retain the innocence of a color-blind child untainted by politically correct identity politics. Many people don't have a specific flesh color. Her focus on undertones is an inaudible statement on the nature of color as central to human identity.

She consistently paints female children, but does not identify as feminist. Her paintings are personal, born of inspirations smudged on backseat windows during family road trips. Wilson is a woman, a mother, an artist, and an optimist. She does not admit to direct autobiographical references in her illustrative work. But she is there, ephemeral as youth.

Her solo shows at Pg chart an interlinked path of maturation, from the womb of *Swimmers*, to the infancy of *when we were little*, the childhood *Little Friends*, and adolescence in 2017, for *Polaris*. Her later series, "Quiet Afternoon" has the quality of a belief suspended, a breath held, before remembering.

In thirteen paintings, *Quiet Afternoon* transfixes with a subtle majesty. Her feminine portraiture is deceptively simple, animating life's springtime with fantastical, melancholic palettes. Rainbows, flowers and crowned young women contrast with the rich, yet understated classicism of her imprimatura layers. Like the liberated womanhood of Semiha Berksoy in Turkey, or the cartoonish promise of Keith Haring in America, her art expresses new life coming into its own.

June 9, 11:11 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Excavation

There is a point when history becomes myth and storytelling poetry. In a similar light, national borders exist along territorial spaces that are at once artificial, and yet point to the ungraspable nature of land, beyond anthropocentrism. Laws are meant to be broken, and borders crossed. Natural partitions reconcile the demands of human life with the interdependent spring of biodiversity.

It is a consciousness that the ancients knew and expressed in song. "You lie there beneath Aphrodite's golden ceiling, / Grapes, full with Dionysus' drink," wrote Moero, the first known female poet of Byzantium, active from the fourth to third centuries B.C., whose eternal verses inspired artist Handan Börüteçene to retrace her muses from Istanbul to Venice.

Since the seventh century B.C., decreasingly after the Muslim conquest in 1453, Istanbul was predominantly Greek. Approaching the storied sound where Hagia Sophia still stands beside Topkapı Palace, reams of orange terra-cotta roofs and classical facades spread outward toward the Thracian horizon west, leaning back to a time when polytheists reveled in the remembrance of epics. They slaked their thirst for battle and feared the underworld in Bosphorus taverns.

But there were more feminine graces to the civilization whose might stamped world history with literature, theater, philosophy and the birth of Western art. Moero is said to have been famous in her day, drawing comparisons to Sappho. Her hand brewed a potent potion of passion for the merriment of the everyday, slipping carefree into the magic presence of deities. Börüteçene photographed traces of her legacy from 1999 to 2014.

*I Remained Within Myself* vitalizes the well-trod floors of Hagia Sophia. Moero lived about six centuries before it was built, though its spiritual architecture returns a kind of innocence to the original intent of industry as a superfluous, human beautification of the world. In her photos, the white columns are elaborated with motifs as fine and ornate as lace. The gold mosaics reflect an otherworldly sheen surrounded by medieval seraphim and Arabic calligraphy.

In each of the twelve images displayed within the best lit section of the second floor exhibition in Salt Beyoğlu, the centerpiece is a dress, dyed in a fluorescent aquamarine hue, with its white stitches showing simple, crisscrossed patterns. Within each shape of sewn textile, there are fragments of what look like antique ceramics. It is the garment of a ghostly wanderer whose voice speaks in the silence of stone.

She hovers, casting a shadow. The most important Byzantine structure is empty of people. And the lone adornments of a lost human figure is all the more haunting in the context of individualized, historical revisitation. In one photo, where her head might have proudly gazed into the lens of modernity, she is radiantly backlit by streams of white light filling a room of murals depicting saints below the prophet mired in an earthly struggle.

*I Remained Within Myself* dialogues with apparitions of female human form that emerge from the stone and its cold, timeworn environs. The likeness of a woman from the prophet's family begs upward, her face barely surviving the mosaic of her vanished body. And the spectral dress stands straight, as Moero might in solidarity with her bygone society. Her presence alone is a poem, written in the interventionist, disappearing ink of Börüteçene's artistic whims.

Surmounting the clean steps of Salt Beyoğlu to the second floor exhibition to see *Replica of the Original* begins with a meeting of eyes. A piece by Egyptian artist Iman Issa is lengthily titled *Material for a sculpture proposed as an alternative to a monument that has become an embarrassment to its people* (2010). Its soft, welcoming presence mirrors the animation of lidless eyes going in and out of focus.

The neo-minimalism of Issa is further pronounced around the corner by Hong Kong artist Pak Sheung Chuen, whose series of photocopied paper sheets, *White Library / A Mind Reaching for Emptiness #9* (2009) tastefully depict the frontal shape and form of a book, or of reading material in frontal view. In perspective, and directness, it is not unlike the photographs of Börüteçene, or the post-materialist paper art of local artist Ezgi Tok from her show in the small Karaköy gallery Pasaj last year.

*Replica of the Original* is foremost a delightful, decorative affair, a feast for the eyes, and as light on the mind as anyone might wish, despite the ideas behind what is seen. It is not at all shallow, but by being firstly visual, compliments the conceptual background. At the same time it is possible to plumb its depths, ideal for the urban geography of Salt Beyoğlu on a drag where lowbrow entertainments are increasingly the order of the day.

Akbiyikoğlu achieves a profound balance between emptiness in the expansive hall and the displays of art. The works together do not force cerebral or superficial impressions. The show sources a treasury of conceptual practices and research projects, intertwining new multimedia with long-established disciplines. The artworks of Börüteçene are the focal point of the exhibition along with Mark Dion, whose *Dig Culture* (2011) was shown at Salt Galata's inauguration.

The exhaustive excavation of wares and tools on rustic wooden planks conveys the air of a scientific outdoorsman after a good day in the field. Dion, who is from Massachusetts, is a peculiar transplant, training his intellectual spheres of influence from the Algonquin shore to the Ottoman city. Tin pots and copper spoons are neatly lined beside the familiar glass bottles and gas lamps of a bygone, rustier era.

Initially commissioned for the 2011 show, *Scramble for the Past: A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire, 1753-1914*, Dion meticulously resurrects outmoded material works for his *Dig Culture*, which is accompanied by a drawing outlining his visualization. He clearly ordered the presentation of archaeological findings by size, also demonstrating how types of objects are related not only to dimensions, but to the ground, as the lowest rung of objects sits in piled sand.

The sculptural series by Börüteçene, *For Every Sea* is a culmination of the luring wonder that entrances toward the eye of the exhibition. Her work is further supported by the metaphor come to fruition in the found wooden pieces of Nancy Atakan. The transcendental globe of Börüteçene's sculptures recurs suffused with natural light at the end of Salt Beyoğlu where the sun pours in from the broad avenue outside.

There are special discoveries to be had at *Replica of the Original*, not unlike that which continues to mystify archaeologists in Turkey, as with the artists of the world who have seen these bewildering, enchanting lands.

June 16, 12:31 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Genesis

A smorgasbord of kinetic, sonic and purely visual multimedia works by Pablo Davila have come to Istanbul for his first solo show in the country, *Under one lamp by day, and billions by night*. Its fourteen interpretations on the theme encompass a retrospective breadth of past exhibitions at The Pill, towards a kind of morphic resonance in the vein of art. They are now temporarily housed under the old Golden Horn roof of its highly pliable white cube.

Inside, beneath a colorless square of ivory-hued signage, over the busy exhaust of Balat's main shorefront thoroughfare, Ayvansaray Avenue, a heavy industrial door leads into a fertile audiovisual field. The air hums with an intensive exercise in the development of a counterintuitive ear for repetition and its other. A custom-coded Yamaha Disklavier piano reenacts the ghostly effects of the player piano, as its keys clamp down untouched.

The performative installation of music without a musician is a strong metaphor for the ideological divides that rage in contemporary art, where the distinction of visual art from all art is blurred into a fog of minced cerebral debris, and the intellectualism of text and its reference to art objects merges into an inverted logocentrism in which the visible is secondary to its resulting conference of verbalisms.

But in Davila, there is redemption. And still, he is not shy to engage the mythic power of naming through an autopoiesis of creation, instilling vibrations that course through emptiness like the tempting serpent of Eden. Its skin, once shed, becomes a trace of its past self. Or, as William Gibson wrote, "Time moves in one direction, memory in another." The quote is part of the literary ephemera that accompanies the show.

*Under one lamp by day, and billions by night* is a surefire psychological thriller of enduring and enlightening discoveries, a feast of sensual inspirations slowly exhaled like a long silence after the frazzled bang of a complex, dissonant chord, meticulously programmed into a midi system for eighty-eight keys. As part of his research, Davila crunched numbers to better understand the pedagogical instrument's potential for harmonic variety.

He came to a common conclusion that is no less stunning for its having been fathomed numerous prior to his personal deep dive into the figures. The number of notational possibilities for pianists to play are two to the eighty-eight power or written out entirely: 309, 485, 009, 821, 345, 068, 724, 781, 056. It is no wonder the keyboard has seduced and confounded the greatest minds in human history.

In the hands of Davila, expanded consciousness of the universe is also intimate, personal, flesh and blood. *Nothing Twice* (1997) by the Nobel Prize-winning Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska rests on the piano's mantle where the musician would read sheet music. Its philosophy was summed up by American poet Gregory Corso following Heraclitus's adage: "You cannot step into the same river twice," with, "You can't step in the same river once".

Or, as Szymborska began her poem: "Nothing twice has ever happened or will happen. / That is why we are born amateurs / And will die the same." To accent the unrepeatability of nature in its continuous procession is the forte of Davila, whose Turkish debut is centered by a light bulb swinging at the end of a cable. It revolves silently, entrancing to allure as it deflects. Under the influence of a whirlpool intoxication, the light orbits with the cursed magic of gravity.

Mixed like an erratic chorus of unseeable colors vibrating through the void, the piano resounds, unavoidably present, with a chaos of mechanical precision. It makes for an aural tapestry similar in style to what maddening opacity has ensued in modern composition based on the techniques of twelve-tone serial music. Davila further appreciates the image-language of written music made with charcoal and a copy of the score, *From me flows what you call time* (2019).

In between lines for harp, trumpet and violins, the artist spelled out, "as far," "from beyond," injecting a layered, mental texture into the act of reading, from music, to sound to visualization. His work is a vessel, in the guise of a found object (which is both a musical and art term), through which to reflect on the meaning of cosmogony, namely the origins of the universe in every bit of its diverse manifestation. All parts contain the whole, as the whole its parts.

The dust of history is apparent at The Pill during the exhibition, *Under one lamp by day, and billions by night*. Sourcing the original residue from previous shows, the house curation of Davila's Turkey premier is a dialogue on the invisibility of the past. Some eleven of the fourteen works listed as the art on display are in fact not on display. The rectangular frames of artworks by Mireille Blanc, Leyla Gediz, Apolonia Sokol, and Eva Nielsen are subtle against the white walls of the gallery.

There is a circle within a circle among the impalpable art objects lost to time, titled, *Let us go then* (2019), comprised of violin bows. The installation is something of a representation of the practice of orchestral tuning before a symphonic concert, recalling the uncanny cacophony of polyphonous arrhythmic disharmony. As the linear form of the bow creates a circular perimeter against the whitewashed wall, the arrangement evokes a three-dimensional planetary shape.

Over the spherical, round, and waving contours of nature, straight lines are an affront, reminiscent of the impositions of anthropocentric historiography, from national borders to calendar time. Davila has extracted the violin bow from its element in orchestra pits and bluegrass jams among its countless roles, welcoming its range from classical grandeur to everyman's row.

Arguably the most traditional pieces of Davila's decidedly avant-garde work are a series of perforated canvases known as *Phase Paintings* (2019). With his most recent work, Davila is advancing his peculiar post-materialist and trans-media approaches to the discipline of contemporary art as a demonstration of being in the present, of embodying timelessness by inhabiting objects, processes, expressions, and placements.

With a kindred spirit to the music of Steve Reich, specifically his "Phase" music, for piano and violin, exacting perforations in his three canvas create the optical illusion of a focus softening and sharpening. One makes the impression of water droplets misting into a cascade of indiscernible, minute detail. Another deepens at its core into a spiral, swept in a haze of constellated points of blackness.

The third of Davila's perforated canvases conveys the visceral sense of charging through the intergalactic starry firmament at warp speed. It is an apt picture by which to consider the rise of a Mexican artist to a unique global stature, as Davila has enjoyed exhibitions across Mexico, the U.S., and Lebanon. In Turkey, his is an auspicious new arrival in the free market of ideas.

June 23, 9:47 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Drafts

Although born in Istanbul, Gülay Semercioğlu describes herself as an Anatolian girl. Before moving to the shores of the Bosphorus, her ancestors were raised on the buttery richness of the Gaziantep palate. But they never forgot their taste for its culinary landscape. Her parents still stock their spice cabinet and bread pantry with the ancient vinegar of its pickled vegetables, the dried skins of its searing peppers, and the mouthwatering glory of its honeyed pastries.

Now a mid-career artist, the metaphorical kitchen of her personal creative process also doubles as a place of cultural remembrance. At home in the techniques she has honed for nearly three decades, she continues to reflect on her peculiar emergence of art and craft by literally drawing alternate lines of practice, despite the prestige of her Westward-thinking education from the Painting Department of Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in the 1990s.

Mostly known for her knittings of reflective, metallic wire, which have entered some of the finest institutional collections of contemporary art around the world, she has finally unearthed the raw source of her skills as a draftsman exclusively for her solo show, *Desire to Survive*. The intricacy of her lines on paper has its visual parallel in her labor-intensive warp and weft of the textile aesthetic, with respect for varieties of patterning special to Turkish cultures.

Her nuanced gradations of color, symbolic as they are photogenic, retain the mirror-like animation of her wire-based adaptations, changeable in response to the perspective of the seer. And the utilization of points and stars are transfixing, with perceivable equivalents in the fasteners and screws that she uses when knitting with metal. She quotes liberally from such traditions as Iznik tiles, Hittite goddesses, Ottoman octagons, Kurdish *kilim* rugs.

One piece, titled, *Zilli* (2017), is compact at 30x21cm, though it makes up for its scale with its minute detail, clearly the work of an obsessive perfectionist. Over her kitchen drawings, Semercioğlu devotes herself to a quality all her own, pushing the knife edge of familiar delights with individual originality. She is, in that way, like a fine dining chef who has replaced her ultimate goal of pleasing the tongue with a pure evocation of rapture through the eyes.

Among certain Buddhist faiths, such as is endangered in Tibet, the senses are mediums through which human beings may achieve spiritual freedom from the endlessly tempting cycles of creation and destruction. The art of the Thankga, often scroll paintings on cotton and silk, entrains the faculty of sight through higher planes of consciousness, toward a transcendent experience of what such wisdom practitioners have called liberation through seeing.

Semercioğlu frequently refers to the aniconic prohibition in Islam, which, throughout its multicultural history, has, like orthodox Judaism, disallowed figurative illustration in the context of religious observance. What resulted is millennia of increasingly entrancing developments of geometrical patterns in the Islamic arts, in continuity with earlier Anatolian antecedents in the plastic disciplines of ceramics and sculpture.

In both her drawings and wire works, Semercioğlu uniquely fuses two- and three-dimensional perception. *My Bloomy Lover* (2018) is a feast of tones, as its linear motifs follow progressions of repetition in harmony with the lightness and darkness of subdued shades of beige and gray in contrast to starry cores of blood red. The piece is enlarged, and shocked with a visceral vibrancy as *A Carpet of Red Flowers* (2018), handmade with wire, screws and wood.

She is proud to be Turkish, because of her country's liminal self-definition in confrontation with its neighbors, as the eternal other always in search of its regional and global identities. Turkey is generally unaccepted as a full member of the East, or of the West. Its distinctive, Central Asian brand of Islam is commonly dismissed by the Arab world. And its exotic embrace of Western lifestyles is often tokenized by postcolonial European society.

But for Semercioğlu, marginality is an opportunity through which to embrace internalized opposition through creative pursuits. As in her work, *Zilli*, and *Hands on Hips - Power* (2018), she is foregrounding the body of fertile women, central to the feminine goddess cults mythical to Anatolian prehistory. Its forms remain integral to the sacred geometry of what to a superficial mind would derogate the visual arts of patriarchal monotheist orientations to mere abstraction.

*My Bloomy Lover* excavates sculptural features of Anatolia's ancient feminist themes onto the flat surfaces of her ink drawings and wire textiles. As with *A Carpet of Red Flowers*, she conveys the ram's horn, and female hips, as part of a holism observed by history's oldest civilizations. The comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell explained the shape of cattle horns as a primeval symbol of heaven on earth as the beasts drink dew under the crescent moon.

A legendary scholar who posited the prominence of ecological goddess cultures among prehistoric peoples throughout Eurasia, from Anatolia to the Scandinavia, was Marija Gimbutas. After researching the Neolithic era (7000 B.C. - 3500 B.C.), she coined the term, Old Europe, based on her discovering the existence of female-dominated theocracies, which were egalitarian, peaceful, and organized around matrifocal kinships.

As much as Semercioğlu is influenced by the anonymous ingenuity of her archaic heritage in Turkey, her education, and interests encompass Western art history, especially where the two have touched. For example, she considers the American abstract painter Frank Stella as a true visionary important for her artistic growth. Stella researched the geography of Kayseri, which he applied to his anomalous oeuvre, notably including the lithograph, *Turkish Mambo* (1967).

"At university I was using oil and acrylic. I wanted to be a sculptor. It was impossible to study sculpture and painting. I chose painting. I always feel like I'm making sculpture. I hate using canvas," said Semercioğlu, sipping a coffee at Pi Artworks under Istanbul's summer sun.

You can feel my wire paintings. The light and forms are different when you move. It's real material, perspective, depth. You can say it is op-art, also kinetic art, I sometimes say.



At her solo show in 2015, *Woman on the Wire* in London, where Pi Artworks is headquartered, Semercioğlu catapulted her figurative and geometric interpretations of the primordial matriarch into social import, addressing honor killings and birth control, all the more moving when expressed through the painstaking discipline of knitting with sharp metal wire, vivid as earth and flesh. *Desire to Survive* repositions her methods, but not her madness.

June 27, 7:19 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Lore

In the subconscious of every nation are untold stories and songs, pictures and textures, aromas and emotions that its people know by heart, but do not ordinarily recall because they have moved on, physically and mentally, from acts of remembrance that would urge return. Deeply stored are the faces and forms of peoples and lands, ceremonies and objects since blurred to oblivion by the cacophonous din of modernity, the dizzying rush of globalization.

The flashy compulsions of neoliberal multicultural pluralism come with the corruptions of political power and its exploitive social consolidation. In the name of assimilation, the culturally distinct are disempowered, relegated as historical, or dissident. But the modern nation-state is an invisible chorus of imagined boundaries, like a perfect circle of straight lines through which populations endure the transmigration of their souls from liminal countrysides to urban cores.

It often demands the investigation of an outsider to best sharpen the critical lens through which people in states of transition are represented in cultural expression across the ages. Because time is a figment of artificial superimposition, generally biased to adhere to the straight-and-narrow course of teleological modernism, its definitions are deceiving. Art is especially transcendent, as its meaning and role adapts to every new generational context.

For seasoned critic Peter Schjeldahl, the late senior art critic at *The New Yorker*, whose book, *Hot, Cold, Heavy, Light: 100 Art Writings, 1988-2018* appeared in June of 2019, contemporary art is simply all creative work that exists now, no matter if it was painted in a cave 10,000 years ago in China, or is in the process of being drawn by a kindergartner in America. It is a signature of Turkey and the Orient in general, to develop its artistic heritage seamlessly through contemporary creativity.

In that light, the U.K.-based artist Richard Bartle excavated a treasure of Silk Road art when he discovered a mythical figure called The Black Pen. It was after reading the classic field studies of the twentieth century Turkish art historian Mazhar Şevket İpşiroğlu when Bartle found his enduring muse. İpşiroğlu was also a chief inspiration for his niece, Yıldız Moran, recently celebrated as the first professional female photographer in Turkish history by *Istanbul Modern*.

Bartle prepared an unpretentious solo show of assemblages and sculptures, which are currently on display at a small gallery, and artist residency located in summery Moda, Kadıköy on the Asian side of Istanbul, which goes by the name Halka Art Project (translated literally from Turkish to mean, "circle"). The house motif of circularity has ample relevance in the works of Bartle, who stayed in the historic apartment for two months to develop his practice.

Back in June, 2018, Bartle could be seen tramping through the colorful streets of Istanbul, a foreigner in the postcolonial European tradition of the white man's burden, weighed by a satchel slung over one shoulder, all dressed in black. He would observe the liveliest districts, like

Cihangir, then wake every morning, run by the Sea of Marmara, and work nonstop, reflecting on his first encounter with Siyah Kalem at a Royal Academy of Art exhibition in 2005.

He also surveyed the enviable treasure collection of Topkapı Palace, with its fantastical permanent acquisitions chronicling the history of Islam, from the swords of the caliphs to the Prophet Mohammed's beard. But the miniatures of Siyah Kalem, were, in his words, "idiosyncratic". They tickled his fancy, not unlike the sensation encapsulated by the common Turkish phrase, "Şeytan Tüyü," directly translated, "The Devil's Feather".

Siyah Kalem was a storyteller as much as an artist. The narrative archetypes and characterful depth of his images captivated Bartle, who channeled his inner demons, titling the works of his show, *The Devil's Feather*, and adapting the art of the fourteenth century miniature into fifteen mixed media works on canvas and two sculptures. His monstrous, demonic figures align to the aesthetic affinities of early Turkic art.

From the Buddhist-leaning Uighur societies in the westernmost regions of present-day China to the Persian-influenced Seljuk dynasties who flung themselves across the Central Asian steppes to conquer Jerusalem, Bartle reconstructed the byzantine cultural fusions that traveled with caravans encamped along Silk Road cities. The figurative tastes of the works reanimate a shamanistic, pagan wilderness of human belonging to a world where spirits and men mingle.

Inclined to streams of the fictional imagination born in the U.K., which is steeped in the backcountry folklore of wood fairies, mountain gnomes and riverine wisps, Bartle trained his eyes on humanoid beings whose unsavory ascendance to the earth was mythicized by contemporaries of Siyah Kalem, and which the medieval, eastern Turk committed to his classical discipline as a visual artist.

The piece, *Demon Kidnaps Man* (2018) is richly allegorical in form and in style, as its broad-winged, inflated body steps forward with burly legs patterned after the color and semblance of mother-of-pearl inlay, its avian-like torso splattered with black and white paint over a diagrammatic frame. On its shoulders, a stenciled likeness of a man's head stains the canvas deep ocean blue. He is downcast, lost and unrecognizable to his overgrown self.

Bartle makes two-dimensional artwork like a sculptor with a theatrical mind for set design. He has a piercing intuition for the roles that his illustrative subjects play, not only within the limits of the piece itself, but in dialogue with the architectural environment in which his works are seen. The ground floor at Halka Art Project is a claustrophobic, otherworldly interior that feels like a cellar entering further inward, despite never actually descending.

Bartle designed the works of *The Devil's Feather* in the last year. They are titled together, as *All My Demons* (2019), and exhibit an impressively well-researched range of exotic hues and geometric contours befitting the surreal historical setting which inspired them. One piece

foregrounds a duo whose outlines cut into the canvas like the shadow puppetry of Karagöz, which Bartle researched for his 2018 show, *A Nomad's Tale*, also at Halka Art Project.

The two unnerving anthropomorphic beings are warped, unearthly emanations. The pitch blacks and smeared reds swimming within their bodies convey a cosmic violence that swirls in star white trails of abstraction punctuated by hoops of gold. A horse bows under the arms of its ghostly master. The beast appears in the crossfire of an altercation between the faceless pair of mystery creatures. Another piece has a suited man carried away by a mystical ogre of the East.

July 4, 10:33 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Moonlight

Semiha Berksoy first went to Paris to play a night club singer in the movie, *In the Streets of Istanbul* (1931), Turkey's first sound film, directed by Muhsin Ertuğrul. At the Paris Opera, the city fired her creative imagination. She saw Richard Wagner's *The Valkyrie* (1876) and watched with tears misting her eyes as Frida Leider sang the role of Brünnhilde, crooning the "Magic Fire Music" scene in high soprano around a stage literally ablaze with theatrics carried by music that touched a nerve for it was led in the register of her training.

Berksoy would later perform the lead role in Turkey's first professional opera production, *Tosca* (1941). Atatürk found her an exceptional talent, to be primed for a European education. She enlightened "the Father of the Turks" with the ascent of her voice and the whimsies of her persona during a backstage republican soiree. She studied at the Music Academy of Berlin, graduating in 1939 after an encounter with Hitler Youth protesting her as prima donna in a performance honoring Richard Strauss. The local conductor defended her artistry, and won.

As her art suggests, she was moved by profound moral compunction, leading her to confront the traditional mores of her beloved Turkish nation, both aesthetically and thematically, throughout her long and mythical path from stage performer to visual artist. In 1910, Berksoy was born on the shores of the Bosphorus in Istanbul's bucolic Asian side where ancient plane trees shaded storytellers, among them her poet of a father, and painter of a mother. She lived well into her nineties, prolific as she was infinite.

The boundlessness of her unframed art motivated her return to a sweeping exhibition at the Grand Palais, in the mammoth baroque building of steel, stone and glass in the heart of the City of Lights. Built in 1900 on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition, its halls of iron scrolls and columns of green porphyry launched the wild Fauvism movement five years after opening, when the likes of Henri Matisse and Georges Braque stunned conservative society with audacious palettes. The voluptuous architecture was made to house art, both monumental and decorative.

The art of Berksoy enjoys a carte blanche welcome for eternity in Paris, like a perennial flower that, planted once, blooms every spring. In 1971, she painted *Love under the Moonlight* with oil on an artificial isorel masonite wood, giving her post-cubistic figures a curvilinear backdrop of cascading metallic green. Manatee-like, the finned beings are swathed in currents of liquid dyed as with the living hues of waving sea vegetables. Speckled with erasures of white in its corners, oxygen breaks through the submerged paradise, centered by a pair of enigmas.

The vertical geometry of the piece touches on the nature of bodily portrayal, of paint inhabiting singular forms that find symmetrical union with their opposites. A shorter and taller frame are locked in an embrace as otherworldly as it is tender. There is something consistently moving to recognizable human expression in creatures that are familiar only by shared emotion, advancing universal humanism throughout the untold variations of creation. With delicate traces of line, she captures the beauty of an embrace, a kiss.

The alien lovers of Berksoy's imagination are extraterrestrials of a lunar order, cocooned to the lips, exposing anthropoid heads slit with eyes that seem somehow magically sleepy, adrift in the fog of a flowing expanse, as earth tones stream below them. Yet, themselves void of color, as with the split disk of white above them, they are of a celestial ilk. Descending halfway below a pale line of smudged paint, they are lowered as by a line cast from the dark side of the moon, radiantly enfolded in their intimacy over the darkening ocean green under which they surface.

*Love under the Moonlight* hangs on a wall nearly halfway through the stunning collections that mark the fiftieth anniversary since NASA orchestrated the inaugural lunar landing in 1969. The personal effects of the men who pioneered the Apollo 11 mission are lit behind glass, introducing the show beside iconic documentary space photos before revealing a smorgasbord of historic and contemporary artistic and scientific interpretations that wind back the clock from the space race to earlier preconceptions of the moon and its significance for earthlings.

With its dedication to transcultural epiphanies, the prestigious duo Philippe Malgouyres, chief curator at the Louvre, and Alexia Fabre, of the MAC VAL, represented a range of geographies and civilizations that have set their sights on the moon since the dawn of humanity. Not far from the Berksoy is an Ottoman lunar calendar from the eighteenth century, with a description clarifying how, for Muslims, there are, on paper, ten less days a year. Two lengths of scrolled gilt parchment show the meticulous, calligraphic observations of the moon in kaleidoscopic detail.

In 1910, the orientalist painter Etienne Dinet steered his ethnographic gaze, from which he gleaned his famously exotic subjects across the desert mountains of North Africa, on a chorus of turbaned men squinting into the gaining light for a sign of Ramadan. A lone boy is splayed out over the rocks, fasting alongside his elders whose eyes peer hard into the darkening sky. The curators failed to identify Dinet in full. In Algeria, he converted to Islam, changed his name to Nasr'Eddine, taking the pilgrimage to the Hajj in his final year.

The last of seven galleries at the Grand Palais furnished for *The Moon* exhibition is subtitled, *An Invitation to Beauty*. It features paintings and sculptures that romanticize the charm of the moon as its light lands on earth every night, sparking a mirrored mysticism that is, in the eyes of artists, no less miraculous and extraordinary than the lunar landing itself. The idea of another world has its parallel when retracing lines of sight that once prevailed between continents, when to look east was to pierce a veil of darkness as absolute as the night sky.

Known for his mastery of seascapes, Ivan Aivazovsky, the nineteenth century Russian-American painter in the Romantic tradition, heard his muse in the 10th canto of *Les Orientales* (1829) by Victor Hugo. His painting, *Clair de lune sur le Bosphore* (1894), is almost directly adapted from the language of Hugo, whose poetry sings liltingly of a sultana leaning into breezes wafting over the lapping shores of the strait, as she listens to the silent mosque of Ortaköy, and plays her guitar. But in his oils, the moon is an astronomical inferno that beats down like time on a busy port city.

Fifty years on, humanity's intimate brush with its natural satellite has not dashed supernal visions of the moon as that ungraspable entity, like the unearthly love of Berksoy's painting. And in the attempt to make its magic visible, its luminosity enraptures, causing those under its sway to invent, create and finally fall for the undying passion that its mysteries possess.

July 14, 3:40 AM  
Paris, France

## Collagist

As his formal education is not in fine arts but communication and interior design, Metehan Özcan is a refreshing figure in Turkey's cultural landscape. His artwork does not engage through a dense, and ideological front of concepts cloaked in references to philosophy, criticism and aesthetics. Nonetheless, the technical grace and spatial harmony of his works exemplify a suite of visual dialogues on the relationship between form and time.

With photography as his main medium, Özcan consciously interprets the reproductive precedence of its saturation in contemporary life. In that respect, his curatorial eye wanders back to the architectural and communal history of his country. His collages, mostly gleaned from his previous show at the disbanded Tophane gallery, *Elipsis*, are interlaced with people, rooms and buildings, toward a kind of silent noir storyboard of a plastic imagination.

Before his first solo show in 2010, at Operation Room, a gallery of the American Hospital in Istanbul, he was photographing houses on the Asian side of the Bosphorus built between the 1930s and the '80s, Turkey's modernist era, without architectural knowledge, to document real estate. He began posting his photos on a modest website, sharing them with university colleagues and soon enjoyed a market in architectural publications, which initiated him with the art world.

With a promising art career since participating in the Venice Architecture Biennial in 2014, the works at *Dekor* are almost like a retrospective. His encyclopedic foray, *Recipes 24* (2014), which appeared in the Turkish pavilion in Venice, explore an intriguing, counterintuitive espionage of interiorized perspectives. But for *Dekor*, he is still exhibiting his favorite photograph, *Untitled 20* (2008) from his first show.

*Untitled 20* (2008) is framed within itself by two white window panes. From the outside looking in, Özcan delved into his training as an interior designer to hone his eye on an otherwise derelict domestic environment, complete with an upturned kitchen sink and other fixtures in transition. Part of the glass is stained with streaks of purple, contrasting the rectangular lines of the boxed and walled former home with an affirming splash of movement.

Born in 1975 in Istanbul, later studying in Ankara and now living in İzmir, Özcan has a broad understanding of the art field, not only from the last ten years, pursuing his career as a leading photographer, but by virtue of his profession he is a keen observer. He is also among a generation of workers in Turkey's cultural sector who has seen groundswells of social change. His art exhibitions testify to the inbuilt amnesia of local historiography and the challenges of remembering.

The perceptive fieldwork of Özcan is also a visual comment on the contrast between instantaneous photographic renderings of artificial space and the long drawn-out passage of culturally defined time, which simultaneously manifests in the kind of fixed images that Özcan produces.



"In 2010, the gallery system was different. There were more gallery openings and more exhibitions. Now, there are lots of independent groups and spaces," said Özcan.

With the increase of social media, photography is huge. In the early 2000s, before Facebook, I opened an account on Flickr. Urban decay is a major focus for the U.S. and Eastern Europe. I thought the stories of the buildings and the tenants would add something other than the image itself.

In terms of media, *Dekor* uniquely differs from Metehan's former exhibitions in its use of text. While he displays photos from *Vacuum* (2010), his show at Operation Room, and collages from *Illustrated Information* (2013), the introduction of text into his oeuvre has the effect of reopening the historical space he portrays through the lenses of his various cameras, and which he also fishes out of vintage collections of unappreciated negatives, postcards and other ephemera.

"Since we became image-based readers, our attention is full of billions of images," said Özcan.

We consume them in seconds and look at another. It is hard for me to share something that I'm also fed up with already. I decided to find unrelated photos to tell a story, or photos of the same building from a different era, or a version pictured by tenants who have an actual memory of the place, to make a broader conversation.

His piece *City Guide* (2019) is essentially eight strips of paper inked with the names of professions from an old directory in İzmir, long before the internet changed the way public information is shared and known. It includes some occupations, like a hay farmer, which are all but lost to İzmir's history of urbanization as Turkey's third-largest city of over four million inhabitants on the Aegean coast.

In a three-minute video titled *Dekor 6* that Özcan calls the "clue of the exhibition," he explores recurring motifs that run through his show at Versus Art Project. The key image, moving in the video, and later still in his altered *Dekor* series of photographs, is that of a bridge over a watercourse in which the refuse of the city's material overburden are caught on the legs of the metal structure.

*1.2.3. Dekor* (2019) presents a triad of upholstered wooden chairs reminiscent of late twentieth century Turkish domesticity, only he juxtaposes waterlogged cuts of cardboard and broken furniture pressed helplessly by a rushing stream against the structure's vertical beams onto the legs of the chairs with a seamless ingenuity. The subtle quality of his digital double exposures collocate interiors with exteriors.

His is an artful interrogation of residential psychology as an ecology of human habitation in which agricultural-based civilizations visibly separate homes from the land. The eyesore skyscraper condominium escalates the modernist rift from nature with spectacular flagrancy.

Özcan curated a found photograph of an early high-rise in Turkey for his wall-panel of eighteen visuals also titled, *City Guide* (2019), with text from the alphabetical pagination of his archaic directory.

*Dekor* invites further investigation into one of the most enduring questions in art history, namely the function of art. Based on the title of the show alone, *Dekor* connotes the argument that art is best purposed for mere decoration, or more exactly, that it expresses its Latin root "decorum," meaning good taste. *Dekor 4* (2019) reexamines these distinctions with its exterior of an open-pit mine backgrounding a catalogue advert of a kitchen that Özcan flooded.

"*Dekor* comes from the idea of the realness of the city. It is always designed by someone, all of the landscape, buildings, trees. We think and consume that as a reality of our time, or the reality of that geography, but mostly they are not," said Özcan.

It is a kind of decoration by the municipality for the sake of the public. In the Aegean coast, there are palm trees. But those trees are from somewhere else. In İzmir, that's the case. Now, it is how the city is remembered.

July 21, 3:52 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Fringe

From a clogged artery in the heart of Kerkyra, a cheap municipal bus trails smog between the aquamarine sky and emerald treetops of the Ionian island that ancient myth says the sea god Poseidon named after a nymph he kidnapped and took there. But every season it is Corfu to millions of sun-drenched foreign eyes who squander the Venetian architecture of the core town with its medieval clothesline alleys and pearly stonework boulevards befitting an unsurpassed example of UNESCO-enshrined world heritage.

Beyond the bustle of hyper-dense urbanization amid the historic preservation, bucolic hills stretch across the embracing, verdant horizon, where sleepy residential districts are spotty and unevenly distribute the occasional nondescript hotel, or humdrum eatery. Magenta and coral paint brightens the concrete shell infrastructure in the remote part of a country that has struggled on the world stage with its incontrovertible overdose of debt. But dependency does not seem overt in a place where art, foremost, thrives in such unlikely, fertile soil.

The sign for what is a most rural annex for the National Gallery of Greece hangs askew behind an overgrowth of bushes and an electric pole. The bus from town does not stop there at its destination, but instead opens its door, and without coming to a full stop, lets off passengers who might curiously wander for a good, breezy walk through high arboreal corridors and sloping woodland estates. Traversing patches of shade, a low wall opens, welcoming at its cornerstone pillar with an outdoor canvas, printed to read: Greek Painting.

But inside, through a black iron gate, the rustic building awaits with smiling receptionists who double as security. The largely undisturbed entrance is complete with modest displays of artist books and catalog literature, leading to three floors of art, mostly painting, from sixteenth-century religious icons to contemporary political installations. Immediately, from the nineteenth century, a greatly prolific era for oils, the unmistakable characteristics of the Ottoman-era flash like lightning bolts across the nationalistic palate.

The castled island had been Venetian since 1401 until the French seized what was one of the most fortified European cities in 1797. For seven years, an Ottoman-Russian alliance gained nominal control. But by mid-century, it would share in the heritage of the lands encompassed by modern Greece. The fez appears strikingly Ottoman in a painting by Charalambos Pachis titled, *May Day on Corfu* (1875-1890). A man in a group of revelers wears a red, tasseled cap, columned and stiff, unique from the Corfu variety, and glares back directly into the artist's gaze.

The fez was as symbolic for surrounding regions on the opposite side of Ottoman borders as it was for the subjects of the sultan. The painter Nikephoros Lytras, born in 1832, contrasted the image of its wearer with his undated canvas, *Boy in a fez*. The figure is roughly etched in blotches of subtly patterned, pale skin tones in the style of the mature phase of the school of the Ionian Islands, an art movement that embraced Western elements, dialoguing with its subjects, while the rest of Greece looked eastward.

The artist Pericles Chelmis, whose date of birth is not exactly known, although it is approximated to 1818, had an eye for Ottoman Greeks. His painting *Man from Chios* depicts a flower of masculinity, a stout fellow in the prime of his life. He wears a billowing, oversized shalwar tightened below the kneecap to reveal his gleaming, high white socks and black shoes, a feature that separated him from Muslims, who wore yellow shoes. His tightly buttoned vest, and mustachioed mien shows a proud nineteenth century islander.

*Triumphal Entry of Othon and Amalia in Athens*, an undated oil by Dionyssios Tsokos, shows the arrival of the first king and queen in Greece to Athens, at the time a backwater Ottoman city, which became the capital of the new state after much argument over alternatives. The royal couple is seen in the shadow of the famed acropolis, encircled by spirited bands of soldiers with upraised arms. Interestingly, the artist detailed the back of one fighting man's vest. Its red felt cutout motifs and gilt-thread stitch are iconic to Ottoman garment crafts.

The artist Theodoros Rallis painted a scene that could have occurred anywhere in the Ottoman Empire for his work, *Arabian soldier flirting* (1878). The tall turbaned man leans on his chest-height musket, robed in a long kaftan. He stands underneath a wooden doorway framed at its crown by a piece of Arabic calligraphy, likely from the Quran, as a measure of protection for the dwelling. The military man looks up through the latticework of a bay window hanging over the street, as the two fantasists make merry for a passing bout of candid amusement.

In 1894, the thirty-five-year-old oil painter Symeon Savvidis finished a masterful work entitled, *Muslim woman praying*. Its technical wonders are only outmatched by the empathic nature of the depiction. He did not merely convey an entirely private moment. He exposed the humanity of a person who at the time would have been seen as an enemy to most Greeks, as they founded a nation based on the dominance of Christian society. The painting is a riveting accomplishment for the social history of Greek art, and as an expression of creative sensitivity.

Within the frame of *Muslim woman praying*, the flowing, purple dress of the believer covers the mat that she would use for her prostration. She holds one hand out, and, in a painterly gesture that could be interpreted as sympathetic to the authenticity of the Islamic faith, a glowing light is cast against the wall where she is pointing, as proof of divine intervention. Painted with techniques and colorations similar to *Boy in a fez* by Nikephoros Lytras, Savvidis worked during a divisive political moment, yet through art, became intimate with the other. After the turn of the twentieth century, modernism usurped portraiture for more naturalistic and technical variations. The relationship artists would have to history became less documentary, more in tune with the prevailing, nonconformist philosophies of creativity that continue to inform and inspire Greek and Turkish artists today, as with all people from former Ottoman lands, and across the planet.

July 27, 7:41 PM  
Corfu, Greece

## Mediterranean

By the sandstone docks of Marseille, the all-seeing spire of the Neo-Byzantine and Romanesque basilica of Notre-Dame de la Garde shoots upward from the steep peak of the city's high ground. Its orientalist gothic facade keeps watch over the spectacularly renovated seventeenth century Fort Saint-Jean.

Of burnished metal and overgrown rock, the walls of the modernized complex screams of battles and prisoners, revolutionaries and pirates. Its haunting, cold interior is peaked with a blunt lighthouse rising above herbaceous borders and bridged verandas. Sailboats slip beneath its gray waters, escaping outward to face the open horizon of cresting waves and cloudy sky.

Inside, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (Mucem) exhibits the life's work of French painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet, alongside those he inspired. Few have questioned the widely held and generally uncriticized belief that culture and art are naturally akin more than Dubuffet, one of the twentieth century's most prolific artists.

Linked by a footbridge, the interlaced metallic exterior of the J4 building annex at Mucem mirrors the waving contours of the seascape. In one of its grand halls, *Jean Dubuffet, a barbarian in Europe*, the retrospective's title, comprises two hundred and ninety works and objects from collections throughout Europe. It opens with a collage of twenty-eight acrylics, *Le Dechiffreur (The Decoder, 1977)*.

Within its contiguous blot of rudimentary forms, scrawled strokes of distended frenetics and quixotic schemes of darkened psychedelia, there is a large-headed figure holding its center. Encapsulated by a rounded rectangular frame, the human likeness embodies the *The Decoder*, surrounded by a sprawl of unreason.

Dubuffet was an iconoclast in the complete sense of the word's history as a Greek religious term for the breaking of idols. His artwork was not merely decorative, or even art as such, but more critical investigations to unmask Western acculturation, foregrounding the invisible and unknown beneath its thin facade.

An emblematic illustration of Dubuffet's overarching Art Brut concepts is clear in one of his early paintings, an oil on canvas titled, *Petit Sergent-Major* (1943). It is important to note the date of the piece, as it indicates the crystallization of his philosophical approach to art as the right and dignity of the common man. *Petit Sergent-Major* denudes militarism, literally, with an expressionist bent

Born in 1901 in Le Havre, Dubuffet arguably formed the ideas that still galvanize art world politics among the intellectual heyday of Europe's interwar period. The anti-establishment movements of Dada, Cubism, and Surrealism broke the surf of conservatism in art in an attempt to counter the Western narrative of almighty reason.

It appears plausible that only Art Brut survived the historical tokenism that has diminished the relevance of other early twentieth century schools in art history. Their subversions reacted to the special challenges of the era, now long outmoded.

The ongoing spread of Art Brut reinforces its core principles against cultural domination and the institutionalization of art. Dubuffet had peerless foresight. He delivered his evergreen message at a conference for painters as early as 1945, stating: "Art is a field that is open to everyone and does not require particular gifts, or prior education or instruction."

His experience in Paris had a direct influence. As an undistinguished art student and aspiring bohemian of the late 1910s, Dubuffet did not feel he belonged in the inner circles of Montparnasse's storied studios and salons. It was only after turning forty when he devoted himself exclusively to art, having established a profitable wine-making business.

To Dubuffet, the definition of art as culture was at best limiting and at worst asphyxiating. He explained as such in his slim book, *Asphyxiating Culture* (1968). He wrote: "The loss of consciousness of the world generates monstrous deformations and grotesque denaturations." His tireless dedication to craft as inseparable from his pedagogy has rippled through time and particularly across the Mediterranean in uniquely diverse cities like Marseille and Istanbul.

Adnan Alahmad, an Aleppo transplant, has visions of Arab and Turkish unity through art. His cultural activism as the director of Kelimat Gallery has brought solo and group exhibitions to Istanbul with an exacting and comprehensive regional focus, encompassing everyone from the women sculptors of Iraq's multidisciplinary collectives to painters whose canvases are heavy with the gravel of Syrian battlefields.

Alahmad has a weakness for an unsung Art Brut pioneer named Esmâ Ekiz. She was a local Turkish woman from Kuzguncuk, a village-like neighborhood on the Bosphorus where Kelimat Gallery was located before moving to the breezy, arboreal highland of Koşuyolu, overlooking the Sea of Marmara. Ekiz is a late unknown. Her radical productivity is mystifying, all the more so when considering her complete lack of training, and outsider status despite being from a large family of artists.

Kelimat Gallery's new, unrivaled museum for Art Brut enthusiasts in Istanbul will be tasked to curate over two hundred and fifty of her collected works, ranging through pointillism and abstraction, landscape and portraiture, all in her unmistakably naive style. A second floor will revolve around Ekrem Zave, a painter who never left his Syrian homeland of Qamishli, where his otherworldly figures are lathered onto found materials, like wallpaper, stripped from his war-torn home.

Finally, the third floor of the Art Brut museum at Kelimat Gallery will be dedicated to the Turkish watercolorist and action painter Zeynel Erdoğan, who recently added new large-scale

canvases to Alahmad's museum catalogue in the past few months. Scattered over brushes of pale blues smudged seamlessly into delicate swathes of green, his black drip dialogues with a backdrop that, in contrast, retains, and even accents the pure emptiness of its beginning and end.

Interwoven throughout the multilevel trio of spotlighted works by Ekiz, Zave and Erdoğan, the Art Brut museum at Kelimat Gallery will curate similarly under-appreciated diamonds in the relatively untouched rough of unschooled artists from the reaches of the eastern Mediterranean. Alahmad is a steadfast independent scholar and singular collector of Turkish and Arab artists who have largely gone under the mainstream radar. He is conversant with names remote from the contemporary Western canon, like the illiterate painter Abu Sabhiletinawi, an Arab master of the Art Brut tradition whose tapestry-like figurative epics drew from ancient poetic sagas such as "Anta" and "Abla."

The pre-Islamic fable was also a muse for another Damascene painter of the Art Brut persuasion, Naji Obeid who passed away in July at 101 years of age. Alahmad has some of his most prized works of ink on canvas. Dating from the 1960s, they are medieval fantasies of errant knighthood celebrating the universality of romance, art, beauty and humanity.

August 4, 2:04 PM  
Marseille, France

## Different

In her introductory catalogue essay, artist and curator Burçak Bingöl elaborated on the meaning of the latest Young Fresh Different exhibition, titled, *One Must Continue*. She referred to ten years of uninterrupted activity as a momentous occasion in Turkey's cultural sector, particularly for contemporary artists. Bingöl envisioned the precarious fate of her nation as a textile metaphor, how unpredictability is woven into its delicate and nuanced fabrics.

Between the affordable fair, Mamut Art Project, and other annual competition series at Akbank Sanat and Galata Greek School, socioeconomic stability for early career multidisciplinary makers and conceptualists is invaluable for professional development. Zilberman Gallery has the distinction of organizing, since its inception, the prestige of a growing, international network of curatorial spaces; two in Istanbul and one in Berlin.

Bingöl holds a PhD in ceramics from Hacettepe University in Ankara, where she grew up. She arrived on the scene in Istanbul in 2010, two years after earning her doctoral degree, and enjoyed what she remembers as a “serendipitous” encounter with Moiz Zilberman, the founder of his eponymous contemporary art gallery. Soon, she rose from artist representation to serving as artistic director, which she describes as equally important to her creative process.

For seven years, Bingöl has been on the selection committee of the Young Fresh Different exhibition series. Her concerns are as immediate as they are enduring. She understands the intimate nature of personal accomplishment and professional recognition, how early careerism in the arts is linked to the contrasts of originality and renewability. An artist takes risks while remaining relevant as an active presence among fellow exhibitors and tastemakers.

In a comprehensive article for Turkey's contemporary art magazine *Exhibist*, the art writer Lotte Laub digested Bingöl's pair of recent exhibitions at Zilberman Gallery's locations in Istanbul and Berlin, casting a critical light on how her practices are reflected in her curations. Behind the helm of Young Fresh Different, Bingöl is responsible for designating new artists, clearing a space from which unprecedented ideas and techniques might emerge and electrify.

“Old has an impact on new, tradition influences future, the present influences our understanding of the past. The result is hybrid forms between dissolution and taking shape, between drying and liquefaction, and forms that have solidified while taking shape,” Laub wrote about Bingöl's work, in which she intervenes in the myriad elements of Istanbul's multilayered construction, conjoined and shattered amid competing temporalities.

Ultimately, between her concurrent shows in Istanbul and Berlin, and extending with her curation of Young Fresh Different, she channels a utopian vision for modernized ancient cities like Istanbul, adapting the innate, transformative potential of urban materialism into a plastic field just waiting to be plied and recast in the hands and minds of wide-eyed youth. As the issues of artist sustainability haunt even the most cultured of societies, Bingöl is a fortifying voice.



“Artists need such great moral and tangible support in order to continue this particular state of existence and work, which is remarkably difficult to maintain,” she wrote, airing her thoughts for Young Fresh Different 10.

“In the current atmosphere where state-funded support is negligible to none, where almost all activities are facilitated through private funds, finding this particular space can get at least as complicated as making art.

With artwork in the such world-famous collections as that preserved for global posterity by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Bingöl, who was born in 1976, arguably deserves the authority she has claimed to define the mass succession of waves that crash relentlessly onto the institutions of contemporary art, demanding changes as radical as the ideals of individualism and freethinking that they purportedly champion.

The tenth edition of Young Fresh Different encompassed artists whose works have appeared in its past exhibitions. Bingöl admits that the artists “are perhaps less young than they used to be, but still remain as different and productive as ever”. As much as she is their curator and peer, Bingöl also follows the twelve artists that she selected for the current show because, simply, they inspire her.

Part of the mission of Young Fresh Different is to pave the way, or more aptly, to place a unique web of cobblestones onto an untrodden region that would otherwise be impassable. Bingöl identifies the special importance of text in relation to visual art and its exhibition as essential to the greater project of relaying contemporary culture across generations, from artists to seers and back, through a dialectical course of creative interaction.

“In the end, exhibitions end; publications remain,” she wrote, contemplating her choice for the subtitle of Young Fresh Different 10, as quoted by the artist Zeynep Kayan from a mantra by the twentieth century Irish playwright Samuel Beckett: *One Must Continue*. Kayan, who last exhibited solo at Zilberman Gallery with *Temporary Sameness*, collaborated with Özgür Atlagan to produce the installation, *Wall of Correspondence* (2019) exclusively for the show.

Utilizing retro-tech Risograph prints in Kayan’s signature style of stop-motion body rhythms that entrance as they confound, deceptively simple, intricately complex, two looping videos simultaneously reflect off the polished floor from outmoded television monitors. “This might be a kind of a state of compassion, a search for similarity, a coincidence,” Kayan, one of the first Young Fresh Different artists, wrote from Ankara, reconsidering her columns of coupled hands.

Bingöl chose to exhibit the artwork of Zeynep Beler when she first juried contributors to Young Fresh Different during its third edition. Beler, who also works as a translator, explored the idea of the ecological footprint with her multimedia sculptural intervention, *Eidolon* (2019). Assembled

with a suit hanger (dumb butler), muslin curtain, epoxy, acrylics, folio transfer and spray paint, it has the unbecoming signature of an overwrought amateurish art school fantasy.

That superficial criticism comes from a purely photographic perspective, the lens, literally, through which Beler received her education. But in her text, she is deliciously vulnerable, a key ingredient in the Young Fresh Different series being the prompt for artists to write. “I like it when my studio feels the same way: elbows deep in muck, surrounded by smells,” she wrote. Continuity is a function of fixation, the young of old, the fresh of staleness, difference of identity.

August 12, 4:11 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Ashkenazi

In Turkey, the small Jewish minority of some 20,000 people mostly speak Spanish, descending from exiles of the Iberian Peninsula who received an invitation from Istanbul's second sultan, Beyazid II, to settle in what was then a flourishing and expanding Ottoman Empire. They emigrated en masse, most to Thessaloniki, following inquisitions that expelled them and their Muslim compatriots by the turn of the seventeenth century.

They never forgot the land they called *Sepharad* or the dialect they spoke, Ladino. In fact, Turkey is the last place in the world where Ladino or Judaeo-Spanish upholds its distinguished legacy in publishing, due to the efforts to the Ottoman-Turkish Sephardic Cultural Research Center, which globally distributes *El Amaneser* (The Dawn), a monthly supplement of *Şalom* (pronounced as Shalom), the nation's Jewish newspaper.

In Istanbul, they met coreligionists whose second motherland after ancient Judea went by another name, *Ashkenaz*, a Hebrew term for the territory around the Rhineland valleys, mainly in Germany where they had lived since at least the beginning of the second millennium. Their tongue is a blend of High German, including notes of Aramaic, and Slavic and Romance loanwords. It is called Yiddish, which in Yiddish translates, simply, as Jewish.

For two thousand years, it was the lingua franca of European Jews, whose networks crossed imperial boundaries, sharing methods of communication and cultural codes across the breadth of the Western world for a millennium preceding the advent of modern nationalism. During the medieval era, when Latin was primary among the educated elite, the common speech of early Christians was often incomprehensible between neighboring villages.

But local Jews, the Ashkenazim as they are referred to in the Hebrew plural had uniquely coined methods of communication that were simultaneously integrated with the social majority, with whom they dealt, often as mercantilists, while retaining the exclusive color of their linguistic and cultural heritage. Unlike their distant cousins at the end of the Mediterranean in Spain, Istanbul was ever a crucial stopover for pilgrimaging Ashkenazis on the route to Jerusalem.

Schneidertempel, endearingly nicknamed the Tailor's Synagogue by its local community has held several exhibitions, from contemporary art to historical interpretation, along with events and talks in association with the Dr. Markus Arts and Cultural Association. Its programs convey the unique perspective of its people, whose relation to the mainstream narrative of Turkish history was buttressed by the challenges and redemptions of pluralism.

From the piers on either side of the Galata Bridge in Karaköy, urban explorers are likely to climb the tulip-shaped weave of the Camondo Steps, its Neo-Baroque and Art Nouveau architecture attracting street musicians and footsore sightseers. Up from the fortified airs of the Avenue of Banks (in Turkish, Bankalar Caddesi), the elegantly constructed stairway was the vision of Abraham Salomon Camondo, an Istanbul native from a family of Jewish philanthropists.

Ascending the steep slope of the ancient Genoese city, leading under the fourteenth-century shadow of the Romanesque-style Galata Tower, the narrow Felek Street, named after the Turkish word for "fate," winds inward perpendicular to the unmistakable synagogue entrance facade of Schneidertempel. Its unsophisticated hall is characteristic of the relatively plain Ashkenazi ambiance, in contrast to the generally fancier decor of Mediterranean communities.

A single row of wooden benches is all that remains of the bygone congregation founded in 1894, only to close by the 1960s, awaiting its contemporary revitalization as a cultural center beloved by the children of its former members. Under a six-pointed star of window glass stained with effulgent hues of purple, blue, green, red, yellow and white, an antique candleholder is permanently displayed inside the now-empty ark of scrolls, evoking the spirit of remembrance.

Outside the Jewish Museum of Turkey, which is decidedly Sephardic in orientation, Schneidertempel is exhibiting one of the most comprehensive histories of Turkish-Ashkenazi life ever assembled. In from the entranceway, rows of sepia-toned and black-and-white photographs revitalize the presence of Turkey's Yiddish-speaking Jews. Their children are in suits and dresses. Norbert Liberman smiles at his thirteenth birthday party, before his bar-mitzvah.

A picture shot in a studio in Pera shows the young family of Fritz J. Rozental seated, straight-faced, with two boys in sailor's outfits, and a daughter, around three years of age with a flower tied around her arm. Their faces are clear and expressive, the moment captured. All of history is reduced to an instant. Rows of children are lined by height on Kalamış, a summery sailing port in Istanbul facing the Sea of Marmara. It is 1927, as the Bornstein's make merry.

The album of the Bornstein family is remarkably revealing of the spirit of the age, during the heady interwar era after the struggle for world peace had been fought, and women were gaining freedoms, as were artists, thinkers and statesmen. Turkey was growing up. The children accompanied their joyful adults around a movable theater booth for Karagöz shadow puppetry. Three women in the photo look entirely liberated by the Roaring Twenties, dressed fashionably.

The ground floor is relatively spare compared to the second story, where women would sit in the orthodox tradition, separated from the men praying below. The stairway up is marked with interpretive signage detailing the chronology of Ashkenazi history alongside milestones in the building of the Turkish nation, beginning from the sixteenth century. But it was a century earlier when Ashkenazis first settled in Ottoman lands.

Before the invitation of Beyazid II prompted the Sephardic exodus, the Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac Tzarfati wrote a letter to his communities in Germany, Hungary and France. In 1492, Sephardic immigration further stimulated their fellow Jews of the north to prosper with them in the Ottoman Empire, what was then a richly opportune imperial sphere. With their institutions based in the Galata region of Istanbul, the Ashkenazim were well integrated by the nineteenth century.

Together with interpretive texts, glass cases of artifacts detail the life of the community, with such items as a shofar, a ram's horn blown to ring in the Jewish new year and the clothing of a cantor who would have used it, and his sheet music.

Unlikely finds include Ukrainian paper currency in Yiddish, and an Ottoman document registering a Hungarian synagogue in Şişhane, also the more standard Torah scrolls, birth certificates, prayer books and school papers. The peculiar Ashkenazi sense of humor is not lost in Schneidertempel's curation. A series of cartoons by Irvin Mandel are shown with project advisory by Izel Rozental, also a cartoonist for *Şalom*.

August 18, 5:54 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Paper-Thin

Even when the Brooklyn Museum is not showing its Islamic Arts Collection, its sweeping curations inevitably brush up against the Near East. The representation of its landscapes, animals, children, women, men and beliefs were decisive pivots during the changing of the guards of art history, particularly as it has stubbornly shifted its Eurocentric, male gaze to include a broader scope of human expression.

There is arguably no better place from which to explore the aesthetics of social dissidence than at the Brooklyn Museum, a pioneer in the diversification of the cultural sector, as led by youth and minorities. Its current show, *Rembrandt to Picasso: Five Centuries of European Works on Paper*, features famous, deceased, white artists whose legacy demands reevaluation among contemporaries.

The classic exploration of past masters is paired with a single painting by the young, black American painter Titus Kaphar, titled, *Shifting the Gaze* (2017). In April of 2017, Kaphar lectured an audience while standing in front of a canvas he painted to replicate *Family Group in a Landscape* (c. 1648) by Franz Hals, a seventeenth century Dutch portraitist. He spoke about the same issues of colonialism and appropriation that the Islamic world has faced.

Before receiving a standing ovation, he dipped a wide brush in a white paint mixed with linseed oil and smeared it across the faces of the rich European family depicted. He left the black boy standing among them untainted. His message was clear. A color line separates his work from a stout appreciation of historical artworks on paper. Rembrandt is one of the first, pictured in a self-portrait with a plumed cap.

In informal, off-the-cuff commentary informed by a wizardry of craft and an Ivy League fine arts education, the words of Kaphar accompany *Rembrandt to Picasso* with interpretive text. His is the criticism of a studied craftsman. Four works at the show directly reference European art history's confrontations with the Islamic world. They are all by Frenchmen, and with the exception of one, pandered to the popular, and commercial orientalist allure.

Isidore-Alexandre-Augustin Pils, a military painter, was essentially peerless in his approach to representing the Islamic world in his work. He conceived an empathic Social Realism when others would Orientalize the mystical otherness of the East with a Naturalist bent that painted nameless human beings, not unlike black people among northern Europeans, as noble savages at one with the flora and fauna of their foreign and threatening environment.

Pils made *Kabyle Children* (c. 1860s) with graphite and opaque watercolor on brown wove paper. In 1861, Pils left the continent to produce a monumental painting of Napoleon III's reception of Arab chiefs in French Algeria. While the work is lost, his preparatory sketches detail the lives of local children in the Kabyle region. At the time, Napoleon III allowed Berbers to become French citizens if they renounced Islam.

Kaphar observed the beauty of the drawings by Pils. He noted the silence of one child whose mouth is left open. Below the neck the sketch fades away, stylistically akin to the work of other artists in the show sympathetic to the idea of intentionally unfinished art. His delicate lines trace a transparent torso disappearing before the sand-hued edge of the paper. The second figure stands illumined in plain robes exuding humble curiosity from their poor, bright eyes.

The year Pils arrived in Algeria, his compatriot Rodolphe Bresdin made a lithograph printed in the Chine-colle technique. Much of the *Rembrandt to Picasso* exhibitions are comprised of demonstrative explanations as to the complicated, tactile processes of woodcut, engraving, etching and lithography, or ink on stone. *The Good Samaritan* (1861) was originally titled, *Abdel-Kader Aiding a Christian*.

*The Good Samaritan* is a mesmerizing piece of byzantine naturalism. A lone camel patiently awaits its rider, a turbaned emir who bends low to help his Christian brother in need. Bresdin drew the piece to accord with public interest in the West, of the Middle East and its fantastical tales. One such yarn imagined an emir, an Islamic honorific which literally means prince in Arabic, who defied French colonialism, and exiled in Ottoman Syria, helped Christians.

Bresdin, unlike Pils, did not venture to Muslim lands. His illustration was inspired by a French edition of *The Swiss Family Robinson*, from which he copied heavily. In like fashion, Henri Matisse followed the multigenerational tradition among Western, male artists to envision the women of the harem. The moral endurance of *Odalisque* (1924) by Henri Matisse is deeply interrogated by Kaphar in the context of the Brooklyn Museum show.

Kaphar proposed a fictional experiment in historical accountability. He thought up a kind of performance piece, in which Matisse, Picasso and Gauguin are resurrected and invited to see their works hanging in the light of 2019, but that they must sit and listen to people alive today reconsider the relevance of their perspectives in a world in which predominant privileges and power balances are being checked.

The model Henriette Darricarrere posed as an "odalisque," an orientalist term literally from the Turkish root word for "room," connoting a woman confined to a private, domestic space. Matisse's lithograph portrait of her on laid paper was part of the artist's first large-scale monographic exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum, in 1935. In its wake, controversy still stirs.

It is not coincidental, or purely a measure of elegance, that the see-through lace of the odalisque's dress matches the wallpaper design. She is framed, or more bluntly, dehumanized, as another piece of decor. That was an element of visual theory that the monumental painter Eugene Delacroix mastered. His lithograph on wove paper, *Lion of the Atlas Mountains* (1829) is steeped in the Romantic tradition of the East as a wilderness of animal passions.

In 1919, the Irish poet W.B. Yeats versified, "the center cannot hold" in his major work, *The Second Coming*. In modernist style, he was talking about postwar Europe, whose prominence as the center of the world is still coming undone. While such shows as *Rembrandt to Picasso* are steadily curated with reference to the famous idols of Western art history, the subtext of its imagination leads explorative eyes to seek communion with its creative sources.

The Islamic Arts Collection at the Brooklyn Museum is an apt resource to behold the work of Muslim artists who ingeniously developed human expression. They patterned textiles in Uşak, fired clay in İznik, miniaturized Seljuk portraits, calligraphed sacred texts and marbled paper with ink in Istanbul. Also part of the collection, the nineteenth century photography of Pascal Sebah and Policarpe Joaillier in Istanbul represent a turn when subject and object, East and West, merged.

August 25, 4:58 AM  
Brooklyn, USA



## Calligrapher

On sunny days, natural light pours into the Beaux-Arts facade of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and bounces off the white marble of ancient Greek statues. Young artists patiently sketch the immortal contours in the undying tradition of mimesis as millions of curious eyes wander past in the search of visions that, whether made in the last month or 5,000 years ago, may change them for a lifetime, fulfilling the great human need to exercise the aesthetic workings of the mind.

In his peerlessly inventive lectures, the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell would echo the words of California poet Robinson Jeffers when defining that sensibility that is shared across cultures, and that has separated man from beast since the dawn of time. He called it, "superfluous beauty," or, that which is not necessarily necessary, and by virtue of that mysterious, contrasting quality, exudes a beauty that is divine, or simply, extraordinary.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has ever had close relations with the Islamic art world, beginning the decade prior to its opening in Central Park in 1880, where it stands. Two years before the Ottoman Empire leased Cyprus to the British Empire in 1878, while remaining under Turkish rule de jure, the American consul Luigi Palma di Cesnola finalized the purchase of a vast collection of antiquities, now celebrated as the Cesnola Collection of Cypriot Art.

Much of his collection, going back to the Bronze Age, is housed in the second-floor sections for Greek and Roman Art. Its halls neighbor a span of works from Islamic civilizations, namely, Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia and Later South Asia. In one corner, through a contiguous web of interconnected rooms lavished with an impressive scope of artistic traditions crafted by Muslim hands is *The Decorated Word*.

Of the nearly fifty pieces on display for *The Decorated Word*, subtitled, *Writing and Picturing in Islamic Calligraphy*, there are four modernist pieces, all by Iranian artists, and made within the last half-century. *Untitled* (2013) by Golnaz Fathi reimagines the look of calligraphy. She uses the visual vocabulary of an abstract expressionist, inspired by the spontaneous scratches of the seismograph, and electrocardiograph.

Golnaz, whose works have appeared in Istanbul, quotes art history liberally. The curators of *The Decorated Word* at The Met identified her patterns as aligning to the "flung ink" styles of Japanese and Chinese calligraphers, also the action painting of Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline. In her meticulously visioned mashup of acrylic, pen, and varnish on a diptych of two canvases, Golnaz presents a surreal landscape of mirrored mountainous lines, starry cloudbursts of black.

The centerpiece of the show is contemporary, emphasizing the inspired perpetuity of the art of calligraphy from the Islamic world, and its ongoing universal appreciation. A bronze statue titled, *Poet Turning into Heech* (2007) by the Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli is in continuity with his creative practice. Tanavoli, born in 1937, has spent a great deal of his career in search of the

shape of nothingness, embodied by its word in Persian, "heech" (like *hiç* in Turkish, meaning "nothing" in English).

*Poet Turning into Heech* is a play on the anthropomorphic form of the Persian word, "heech," rendered into a column of bronze. The word itself is contorted below a pillar engraved with pseudo-inscriptions in the Arabic script of the Persian language. In a single sculpture, Tanavoli manifested an aggregation of cultural expressions, from the prayer wheels of Tibet to the stone tablets of Mesopotamia.

The late twentieth century works of by the Iranian artist Faramarz Pilaram, titled, *Pair of Calligraphic Compositions* (1979) are in direct dialogue with a staple in calligraphy exhibitions, the exercise page, popularized as art since the sixteenth century. The purely visual effect instills what in Persian is referred to as the *siyah mashq*, literally "black practice," in which overlapping words are encouraged for the calligrapher to isolate their subjective experience of the craft.

The orbital repetition of the words stacked on top of each other into an indecipherable mass directs the eye to see into the essence of calligraphy, which is to write words without a mind for their literal meaning, but instead, to focus exclusively on how they look. The historic calligraphy practice pages on display are from the mid-nineteenth century, by Muhammad Shah Qajar and his court calligrapher, Asadullah Shirazi.

In the Arabic script, there are six main, classical cursives, and two regional calligraphies. The *muhaqqaq* variation, derived from the meaning "clear," was long favored by the caliphates, particularly during the Mameluke era. The Ottomans tended to prefer other styles, such as *Thuluth* or *Naskh*. *The Decorated Word* shows early Turkic usages of *muhaqqaq*. One from the fourteenth century is from a Quran penned with interlinear translations into Persian.

The ink, gold and opaque watercolor leaps off the paper with an exacting freshness imbued with the eternal nature of its significance. While the calligrapher is not known, another piece at the exhibition from the late fourteenth century is identifiably the creation of one Umar Aqta from Samarkand. He inked a fragment of calligraphy for what was likely the largest copy of the Quran ever produced.

The legend goes that Timur, or Tamerlane to the West, received a miniature Quran written in the dust-like *ghubar* script by the calligrapher Aqta, but he disapproved. Aqta came back with a seven-foot tall Quran weighing half a ton, containing some 1,500 pages. The Met included a photograph of the monolithic marble Quran stand from the fifteenth century in front of the Bibi Khanum Mosque in Uzbekistan that held the massively oversized holy book.

The tale pivots the essence of calligraphy, which sees the sacred value of language as the vessel of divine intervention. Prophet Muhammad was illiterate, but he was not denied spiritual revelation, or what Buddhism terms "liberation through hearing." *The Decorated Word* states the

centrality of the Quran as the prime muse for calligraphic art. Exhibited are parchments inked from the ninth to the tenth centuries in the rudimentary *kufic* script.

The dust-like script of Umar Aqta's famous failed Quran was the chosen style of calligrapher Abd al-Qadir Hisari from Turkey, who decorated a prayer book. The Met itemizes the work in transliteration as *du'anama*, which, is based on the words *dua* or prayer in Turkish, and *nama* which means epic in Persian. The tiny calligraphic illustrations of Hisari suffuse Noah's ark, the Kaaba of Mecca, footprints of the Prophet Muhammad, and other iconic images.

One of the more mesmerizing works at the show is a Turkish wool carpet dated from "probably 17th century." Its symmetrically knotted pile bears pseudo-*kufic* script. The curators included a photo of a fifteenth-century Italian painting from a tradition in European art that integrated pseudo-*kufic* script into haloes and the like for its refined airs.

September 1, 4:30 AM  
New York City, USA

## Barrier

During the live performance of *AAA-AAA* (1978) for a television studio in Liege, Belgium, artists Marina Abramovic and Ulay (Frank Uvve Laysiepen) take on animal characteristics. Enacting a battle of tones, they charge through the ether armed with nothing more than vibrating tongues. They approach a metaphysical pressure point. Inflated with raw ambition, they attempt to speak over one another. It is a power play.

Tested and moved by the will to compete, with oneself and with a life partner, a sense of sheer passion overwhelms as Abramovic and Ulay reach the breaking point. In retrospect, *AAA-AAA* comments on the role of stamina in the artists' careers, with Abramovic approximating immortality. While touring last year, the famous cellist and child prodigy Yo-Yo Ma defined creativity as "the tenacity or the will power or the stubbornness or the dog-with-a-bone aspect."

Abramovic is one of the starriest names in the art universe. Her iconic, Serbian mien returns from cultural history with a classic in performance art to grace the introductory curation of *Can You Hear Me Now?* a current show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Outside the modestly sized Cohen and Stone Family Gallery, she and Ulay go tete-a-tete in a display of single-mindedness; powerful because it is personal and it is hard to watch.

Ulay dredges up the pain of his desire to surmount hers. Abramovic trounces him with her unceasing, hoarse, mammalian call. She, a woman, is rooted in the strength of her body that, from the core, has no parallel in the natural world in terms of survival, and its chief means since the Paleolithic, projection. The young Jordanian artist, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, born 1985, further evaluated the tolerability of noise as pollution with his video, *The All-Hearing* (2014).

Abu Hamdan describes himself as a "Private Ear," adapting the synonym for a detective. His research-heavy audio installations are inspired by the underground music scene in northern England, but for his thirteen-minute piece, *The All-Hearing*, he set his documentary lens closer to his Amman upbringing, in the mosques of Cairo, Egypt. Two preachers, one in imam dress, the other in business attire, address prayerful crowds about Islam's counsel on invasive sounds.

"All believers are like brothers, and it is never right to harm a brother," said the preacher in more casual garb. "The Prophet refused loudness even in worship." Abu Hamdan went to Egypt following a 2014 reform enforced by the country's Ministry of Endowments. In the legendary city of a thousand minarets, all sermons require formal approval. Anyone who has been to Cairo knows that the *adhan*, or call to prayer, is heard from all directions.

*The All-Hearing* is as much intervention as it is a work of video. Abu Hamdan demonstrated the social role of art as a neutral and participatory mechanism through which to dialogue with the legal and religious infrastructure. Without official authorization, he convinced two Muslim leaders to talk to their congregants inside the mosque about the entirely secular matter of noisemaking in public.

The Ukrainian filmmaker Anna Kipervaser is thanked at the end of Abu Hamdan's video, *The All-Hearing*. In 2010, she was equipped with a camera and field recorder on the streets of Cairo researching the ambitious Adhan Unification Project, which sought to reduce noise pollution in the largest city in Africa and the Middle East. The idea of streaming the call to prayer through the 4,000 recognized mosques via a single broadcast was more than controversial.

The documentary that Kipervaser produced, *Cairo in One Breath* (2015) is still screened at institutions across the globe, where contemporaries dialogue on the relativity of tradition and its perpetuity in confrontation with the pervasive nature of modern technology. As the American writer William Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Through interpretive angles and immersive interaction with their subjects, Kipervaser and Abu Hamdan appreciate the complexity of the *adhan*, not as noise, but as part of a historic conversation on the presence of sound as a social phenomenon that encompasses both the sacred and mundane.

With scrap metal, wax, burlap, plaster and egg cartons, the Berlin-based Palestinian artist Jumana Manna, born in 1987, sculpted *Kollek, Olmert, Lupolianski and Barkat's Picnic in Silwan, Lord Kitchener's Neck* (2014). Its aesthetic is ruinous, though not of the ancient variety, though her area of focus is Jerusalem. Instead, she underpins the plastic manifestations of social incongruity and the inertial state of conflict that ensues in contested environments.

The modern day borders of Western Palestine are effectively the product of plans devised in the 1870s by a British army officer named Horatio Herbert Kitchener. Manna, who was raised in Jerusalem, found a muse in the vanquished soil of occupied territory, particularly in Silwan, where a Palestinian village rests atop two-millennia old tombs. When people claim the right to a patch of land and refuse to move, they stand on the archetypal ground and symbolize all of humanity.

Among her compatriots, Mona Hatoum is one of the most distinct voices parallel to the national struggle of Palestinian self-determination. However, she is not a woman of words. Her visual art is as removed from verbiage as she was from her homeland when she was forced to remain in England after the outbreak of Lebanon's civil war in 1975. And curiously, her work is not overtly political. She reframes specific aspects of social cause into psychological universalities.

Her piece, *So Much I Want to Say* (1983), is a black-and-white videotape rotation of stills beamed from an outmoded Panasonic monitor. The work figures a self-portrait of the artist with her hands over her face in a variety of smothering contortions. Hatoum is then heard enunciating the title, slightly muffled, over the image's automated repetition. That the only thing she can say is that she cannot say anything is emblematic of her life as a Palestinian woman.

Nearly forty years since she visualized her point, the seven-and-a-half minute video is evergreen. Although from an older generation of performative conceptualists like Abramovic, her experience of subjugation and its discontents as a displaced person living in the West is as immediate as her contemporaries. In the summer of 2018, *So Much I Want To Say* went on display at Istanbul's Riverrun gallery. Its television light beamed through a curtain-length transparent newspaper print.

Throughout her career, Hatoum has recurrently expressed the isolating traumas of dislocation as a modern-day method of conquering. Such politicized forces have the capacity to blind and deafen an entire people, as with every life form, and even inanimate objects that might hold personal resonance. Hatoum's visual tautology has gained intergenerational momentum in Abu Hamdan's metaphor of noise pollution, or the junked space of Manna's neocolonial picnic.

September 9, 3:53 AM  
Chicago, USA

## Visualization

Out of the 195 countries in the world, there are fifty with a Muslim majority. All of them are in the Eastern Hemisphere. Islamic lands are grouped in many ways, from the Middle East popularized by American usage, to the *ummah*, the original Arabic for everyone who identifies as Muslim. In America, where the founding principles of reason-based Western humanism are challenged by the political dogmas of the post-9/11 era, Islam continues to struggle for its place.

Whereas adherents of the elder Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Christianity, generally enjoyed the liberating enlightenments of early European modernism, with its revolutionary French philosophy widely imported beyond the West, initially, by Napoleonic imperialism, the people of Islam, born of the historic crossroads of Arabia and nestled in the global heartlands of Central Asia, fared a vastly different confrontation with the primacy of science and secularism.

When the age of empires faded into nominal archaism at the close of World War I, the last caliph left his throne in Istanbul, where Islam's highest sovereign had taken up the civilization's helm following the death of Prophet Muhammad. Turkey's Westernization clinched nearly 1,300 years of traditional leadership for the billion-plus Muslims who now defer to local imams and muftis presiding over mosque congregants for theological and legal expertise.

Medievalists rightly argue that Muslim intellectuals preserved and cultivated classical Greek learning from the ancient world to the Renaissance, where its research in geography, medicine and mathematics, among other arts and sciences, quickened aesthetic and technological achievements in Christian realms. But the attribution and glory of that transmission is continually swept under the orientalist's magic carpet in the fervor of the cultural moment.

Identity politics and its criticisms are thoroughly reframing the debate regarding how individual and collective contributions to social progress are recognized, and more importantly, written into history. Ultimately, the industry of modernism is shorthand for economic domination, with the Islamic world enduring the cultures of poverty and leaderless disempowerments that have ensued following World War II, when America inherited Britain's worldwide hegemony.

The curators of the Art Institute of Chicago are forwarding a distinct message that parallels and interprets the fundamental tenets of the Prophet Muhammad who, to Muslims, is known as The Messenger. A series of chronologies and maps displays Islam's master narrative of emergence and expansion since the seventh century. When nations are color-coded to percentages of Muslims, former Ottoman territories from the Maghreb to Mesopotamia are unsurpassed.

"When one speaks of Islamic art, the word 'Islamic' is usually meant in a cultural, rather than a religious, sense. Islamic art is typically informed in some way by the religion, but most Islamic art is secular in nature," reads the wall text for the Art Institute of Chicago's permanent exhibition on the Islamic World. "The single term 'Islamic' also denies the incredible variety of cultures that have always existed under the umbrella of Islam."

With recourse to world-class scholarship, the Art Institute of Chicago is paving the way for a welcome reanalysis of Islam's relationship to aesthetic and conceptual relevance in the worlds of contemporary art. In its introduction to the Islamic world, the museum reveals itself as a leader in the understanding of Muslim artists' signature approaches to creativity as forms of secular, cultural integration, not at all mutually opposed to the refinement of local traditions.

Alongside acquisitions from the house collection, with select objects from Turkey curated for general interest, is a temporary display of jewelry from Bukhara, a bygone Uzbek emirate that had its heyday in the nineteenth century. The intricate richness of such pieces as a Quran carrying case from 1890, a masterwork of gilt silver finished with cloisonné enamel and leather, defies verbal representation.

The necklaces, armbands, pendants, earrings and headdresses are mostly of gilt silver inlaid with turquoise, coral, emeralds, rubies and garnets. Men and women of the former Silk Road treasury dressed with high fashion sense, infused with Islamic spirituality. Yet, accents peculiar to indigenous ethnicities are retained, such as in the *ikhat* technique of Bukhara, in which the warp of fabrics are dyed before weaving, creating patterns reminiscent of psychedelic tie-dye.

Between a length of *ikhat*-striped velvet and an intimidatingly beautiful silver diadem with floral motifs encircling the exotic likenesses of frogs and birds, are Ottoman artifacts. One large candlestick from eastern Turkey is dated to the thirteenth century, predating the realization of Osman I's dream of the Ottoman Empire, when an earlier Turkic dynasty, that of the Seljuks, ruled Asia Minor. Like a Greek vase, its imagistic inscriptions moralize hard work as virtuous.

As is noted, Ottoman art patronized its broadest minds most lavishly during the peak of its expansion in the sixteenth century under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, after controlling both its eastern border with Safavid Iran, and westerly, encompassing Tunisia and Hungary. The city of Istanbul became renowned for its architecture, and Bursa, the Ottomans' first imperial capital, for Turkey's famed İznik ceramics.

One dish, manufactured with fritware, or stone paste, over a polychrome-painted underglaze decoration produces the effect of scale patterns and serrated leaves that borders on optical art. The piece, made in İznik when the empire was most powerful in the late sixteenth century, is transcendent in its textural, visual depth. Beside fire bellows of tortoiseshell, a gilded copper flask of ivory, and a steel dagger with a bloodstone grip, the dish complements a pluralist taste.

Throughout the main, entrance floor halls at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Islamic World is found obliquely via Turkey, as in Roman mosaic floor panels from Harbiye, a town in Hatay formerly called Daphne by the Hellenistic ancients. One striking item is a locket for magical texts portraying Saint George, inscribed with Arabic calligraphy by Syrian or Armenian silversmiths from the stretch of land between Mardin and Mosul.



A special curatorial feature among the permanently exhibited works in the galleries of American art is the presence of the Florence-born painter John Singer Sargent, who did not see his country of citizenship until age twenty. As was in vogue among his teachers and peers in France, he was an orientalist. While traveling through the Middle East in 1905-1906, Sargent perused Ottoman lands in modern-day Syria, Jordan and Jerusalem, painting such impressionistic naturalist oils as *Syrian Goats* (1905).

September 15, 10:24 PM  
Chicago, USA

## Midwest

It is 1919, and James Henry Breasted sits upright at his desk, penning letters, tight-lipped, and with a furrowed brow into a broad, gilded notebook. His hair is as white as his starched collar. His bifocals pressed downward, surrounded by leaves of copied manuscripts in the extinct languages of his expertise, from a region he perspicuously named the "Fertile Crescent," encompassing the Near Eastern lands that birthed civilization before Greece knew literacy.

Staring above his trained mien is a Pharaonic profile in the likeness of Nefertiti, that beauty of immortality which the pyramid-builders perfected with sculptural prolificacies unsurpassed. She rests atop a fragment of classical Greek inscriptions, beside an engraved stone pillar and parchments of Egyptian hieroglyphics. At the time, he had been on the University of Chicago faculty for a quarter century, since 1894.

His research effectively recalled mythical Greco-Roman origin stories from the tables of scientists around the world. The dawn of history, he proved, was founded much earlier, where, at the time, the East and West were drawing lines in the sand over territorial disputes that continue to rage today in such places as modern-day Iraq. In conflict zones, the oldest remains of art and technology are increasingly uncovered, and precariously preserved.

Breasted, in his wisdom, founded the Oriental Institute, with considerable financial support, to mine the reaches of Middle Eastern archaeology. He did so in the interest of respecting universal, human heritage. As is written on interpretive placards before the Institute's galleries, "At the time, it was legal practice for the host country to give a portion of the excavated finds to the institution(s) leading or funding the archaeological fieldwork".

Since the turn of the twentieth century, Turkish and Western archaeologists have navigated often dangerous political boundaries in the Near East in a mutual attempt to contextualize findings according to national interest, while spreading the appreciation of humankind's one shared narrative of intellectual and social evolution. By the nineteenth century's end, the initial archaeological free-for-all leapt into repatriation rhetoric between sovereign nations.

Inside the Oriental Institute, before the beginning of recorded time begins with collections from Mesopotamia, there is a special selection of eight artifacts behind a polished glass case, each representing one of the main exhibitions curated for free public entry. One is a fragment of baked clay from the Middle Bronze Age, excavated into the light of day after 3,700 years underground in 1929 in Turkey's village of Alişar Höyük, east of Ankara, and north of Kayseri province.

Only the snub-nosed beak of the ceramicist's bird of prey is left, with its fat gullet beneath a single, round eye. It is said that eagles, hawks and falcons were commonly depicted in ancient Anatolia, as they spied for the gods, and symbolized the royal power that came to emblazon Rome's double-eagled glory. Hunters thought they were clairvoyant. And when moderns say, ornithologist, they speak Hittite. Its root word comes from *haran* for eagle.

At its Syro-Anatolian Gallery, named after the pioneering, early twentieth century female physician Henrietta Herbolsheimer, M.D., the Oriental Institute pays homage to the bounty of civilizational progress that swept across the lands currently defined by Turkey and Syria. It is filled with artifacts mostly gleaned from the Institute's ventures into the young Turkish Republic during the Anatolian Expedition (1927-1932), and the Syrian-Hittite Expedition (1931-1938).

The Amuq Valley, close to Antakya, and Central Anatolia are the most important regions where American-led archaeologists charted vast, prehistoric networks to trade stone, timber and metals from the Neolithic age, extending back to 9,000 B.C. all the way up to the Ottoman era. For five hundred years, in the 2nd millennium B.C., Hittites were one of the most formidable powers in the Near East. A prelude to the diverse store of Hittite relics is an ivory plaque from the Late Bronze Age (1200-1150 B.C.).

The plaque is matchless in its elaboration of Hittite motifs. Excavated in 1936-1937 it displays the wealth of artistic learning that went into the construction of outdoor sanctuaries, many of which can be found dotting the rural landscapes of Anatolia, such as at Eflatun Pınar, about two hundred and fifteen miles south of Ankara. The ivory piece is carved with sun deities, winged disks and all varieties of horned, bearded, dancing creatures from a lost world of the archaic imagination. Interestingly, excavators found the plaque in the palace annex of Megiddo, Israel, along with a cache of prized objects that scholars presume were tribute, or booty, between the neighboring civilizations.

Hittite city-states were first consolidated around 1750 B.C. into one kingdom in a place called Kanesh, or Nesa, which to contemporaries is known as the site of Kültepe in Kayseri. Within a century, the imperial capital moved to Hattusha, where it built an administrative center with some thirty temples near the town of Boğazköy in the bucolic province of Çorum by the Black Sea. Through treaties and marriages, the Hittite empire possessed lands from Cyprus and Troy to the west, and the Upper Euphrates and Hatay to the east. Their palaces were graced with beautiful Syrian and Egyptian princesses, whose jewelry now hangs in Chicago.

Hittite culture revealed their peoples' fine talents for beautifying the mundane. Daily life was punctuated with ritual and festival. Handmade ceramics spun on the potter's wheel attested to a pervasive aesthetic infusion throughout society, from the lowest rungs of its industries in storage wares to pieces like the "Grape-bunch vessel," a curious Middle Bronze Age fabrication of baked clay from Alişar Höyük shaped with a whimsical touch given to its inebriating purposes.

Even activities as seemingly humdrum as economic trade were imbued with visionary, creative dimensions. Hittites were literary. They etched clay tablets with adaptations of everyday life into sagas of mythical proportions. One such fragment, listed as possibly from "Hattusha," modernly Boğazköy is from the Late Bronze Age. It preserves a Hittite legend, "Song of Silver," about a fatherless boy named Silver who becomes the king of heaven.

The "Song of Silver" was essentially liturgy for the Hurrian ethnic group within Hittite lands. Their polytheistic theology followed much of the Mesopotamian belief systems. The eighth century Greek poet Hesiod found his muse in the "Song of Silver" for his classic work, *Theogony*. It is no wonder, as the language, translated by Oriental Institute curators, is enchanting, even in bits: "I sing of Silver, the illust[rious]... Wise men [told] me of the orphan's... It was not to be."

September 22, 9:58 AM  
Chicago, USA

## Abracadabra

The age-old incantation, *abracadabra*, is popularly used by magicians after performing a trick for an audience. Its origins are cloaked in mystery. Some say it derives from Aramaic, believed to be the spoken language of Christ, for "I create like the word." The Roman physician Serenus Sammonicus was the first to print the phrase in the second century of the Common Era, demonstrating his rare knowledge, which he personally taught to two Roman emperors.

Sadly, his foresight was not strong enough to penetrate the treacherous politics of Rome. His second student, Caracalla, murdered him, but not before he had imparted to the world a treasury of learning informed by his private library of 60,000 volumes. Sammonicus was famous for curing fever by arranging the letters of abracadabra with op-art visuality into literary amulets, a pseudo-medical practice that continued throughout the Middle Ages.

As the title of an art exhibition, the fusty saying has an air of self-fulfilling prophecy, as to impose a pomp of ridiculous, egotistic accomplishment, revealing nothing more fantastic than a bald-faced, underwhelming embarrassment on the part of the would-be trickster at center stage. But in the able hands of Halil Altındere, the gimcrack ostentation of the gesture is nothing less than illuminating, and entirely relevant in the context of the running, visual concept at its core.

The opening piece, *Hands of Houdini* (2019), curated by Huo Hanru opposite the introductory, interpretive wall text, conveys a sense of entrapment, that of passersby who must prepare to enter the world of a creative whose full expression is curtailed by the bigger picture in which he is drawn and quartered. Or, more existentially, its metaphor is the human condition, in which the will to freedom is consummated at the expense of life.

But the work is not entirely unprecedented. In 2009, the Turkish artist Cevdet Erek produced a sculptural installation titled, *Two Double Sided Hands on Grille*. He contrasted subjective interiority with its opposite by conceiving twin forms out of the shapes of palms and fingers to imagine being on the inside and outside of a building simultaneously. While the work of Altındere is in many ways incomparably different, its illusive relativity is shared.

On his path to becoming the artist that he is today, a cornerstone of Turkey's international arts profile, Altındere lied to his parents. As a child in Mersin, after studying in Adana, he had enough of the sleepy Mediterranean coasts of his inner Anatolian upbringing. He told his family that he would enroll in postgraduate studies in the arts, but instead, he was planning to meet working artists, and create himself.

That was 1996, when Istanbul's visual art scene was nothing to write home about, a couple galleries and the biennial, then in its tenth incarnation. Young artists were practically invisible. He conjured a leading appearing act together with groups of talkative, likeminded peers, publishing *Art-ist*, Turkey's first contemporary art magazine. Globalization, the internet, and Vasif Kortun, former director of Salt, were entering Istanbul's cultural sector.

The 1990s proved to be a decisive era, in which the hearts and minds of Turkey were shaped and guided by unseen forces. Altındere saw unique angles to integrate art into sensitive social engagement as a kind of public dialogue, not only through verbal means, but as a master of misdirection in the art of sight and its other. The earliest work at *Abrakadabra* is a wax sculpture in his hyperreal style, portraying the late street poet, *Pala Şair* (2008).

The human body is arguably Altındere's main subject for the show at Yapı Kredi. In dress and street attire, he has paid meticulous attention to hair and posture. On entering the initial exhibition hall, a white cube resounds with a self-playing piano. Eerie, minimalistic tones emanate from the unmoving fingertips of the bearded, tuxedoed pianist. The silicon sculpture, *Magic Piano* (2019) begs a close-up, as the degree of its realism is unsettling.

Diagonal across the room, *Hat of Houdini* (2019) rotates over an electric magnet, entrancing with the impression that the vintage black top hat is hovering in space. But his works are not without a sense of humor. Altındere's art is distinct from the touristic, commercial kitsch of Madame Tussaud's wax promenade of celebrities. *Abrakadabra* is about his storytelling. *Traffic Police Car* (2019) faces *The Monument of an Illegal Street Vendor* (2019).

*The Monument of an Illegal Street Vendor* (2019) is part of Altındere's uncanny bent toward visual witticism, by bringing what is generally perceived as lowbrow into elite realms of society with mirror-like, reflective intensity. The wax sculpture portrays a black street vendor in blue jeans and an Adidas hoodie, his neck wrapped in with outmoded headphones. He stands over a blanket of objects officially itemized as "fake bags of luxury brands."

Altındere has consistently sought to close the gaps that divide people in the cultural sector for some of his best-known works, such as the video, *Wonderland* (2013), produced with the Romani rap group, Tahribad-ı İsyân, and the monumental installation, *Köfte Airlines* (2016). Among the new pieces at *Abrakadabra*, are his past hyperreal sculpture, *Boxing Bag* (2012), and an invention out of youth street culture, *Boomerang Skateboard* (2016).

Like his wax sculptures, Altındere continued developing prior themes for certain commissions made especially for *Abrakadabra*, such as his work, *I Won't Cry for You My Mascara is too Expensive (Adriana Lima)* (2019). The handmade gold necklace is a medium that Altındere explored in 2010 with his "Emma Goldman Series", quoting the early twentieth century political activist by contrasting her socialist reputation with capitalistic artifice.

From his gold-plated bronze knuckle duster laden with a Swarovski rock crystal, titled, *Solitaire Brass Knocks* (2016), to the gleaming, *Bitcoin Hip Hop Necklace* (2017), his irony knows no bounds. In fact, he even critiques the allure of Turkish emigration with his LED piece, *Germany Sweet Homeland* (2019) made with laser cut metal letters spelling out the title in German. When not training his critical art on the unsophisticated, he takes aim at high culture.

*Art Lover* (2019), and *Sleeping Museum Guard* (2019) satirically depict the activity of recreational acculturation with an eye on Yapı Kredi Bank's collection of gold-framed classic paintings. The role of gold is again emphasized, indicating unsavory human qualities like greed, as shared by all members of society. That it is not easy to tell which visitor, or museum guard is actually human is Altındere's greatest ruse. Art is magic when the artist gives life to his work.

September 27, 2:47 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Locals

Within the unfinished complex of the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture, slated to open in the spring of 2020, newly design by Turkish architect Emre Arolat, another world has sprouted from the warming oceans of the human imagination. Güneş Terkol and Güçlü Öztekin posit an art practice in which creativity is a vision of sheer will, unfading persistence and collaborative optimism in the face of innumerable self-destructive crises that arise simply by being alive, imperfect and sentient on Earth in the twenty-first century.

Above the constant rattle of construction gutting and rebuilding the ancient port of Tophane, the dust of *The Seventh Continent* is only just settling after its initial crew of pioneers from the art world cleared its interior to welcome the public for the first time. The globalized masses gaze at the mysteries it has curated into a diverse platform for raising common consciousness. Its curious urban explorers enter a storm of exhales, invoking the potential triumphs and trials that await the next generation of humanity.

The perilous confrontation with climate change is a defining cause for the young people of the planet. For them, another world is not only possible, it is necessary. In response, artists regardless of their age from across the globe are visualizing the tremors and rifts that have come to invigorate universal cultural expression with a cause for wholesale social change in every private domain, professional field, remote geography and local community. Whether digital or local, personal or institutional, social contracts are being rewritten to protect the environment.

Individualism has long been a source of intellectual freedom, its philosophies celebrated as the political climax of Western thought. But, collectives, such as the Istanbul-based HaZaVuZu founded jointly by Terkol and Öztekin, demonstrate a powerful alternative, particularly when purposed for creative appreciation as an unrestricted, communal experience. *WORLBMON* (2019), a temporary construction installation of wood, mixed media, drawings, sculptures, sewing and boxes, illustrates Bourriaud's notion of artistic polyphony.

At its beginning, the way into *WORLBMON* is austere, a simple corridor of wooden panels narrowing into a darkening, winding passage. A black curtain conceals the installation's heart. The core concept revolves around the postindustrial convention to recycle nonrenewable waste products, which, despite its best intentions, often still exacerbates the problems of perceiving the universe through purely materialist lenses. Terkol and Öztekin reveal the malleable nature of reality, into which they merge through their work.

The fundamental idea to collectivize, in the style of HaZaVuZu, is to blur the line where one artist ends and the other starts, where individuality becomes one with its surroundings. *WORLBMON* has the whimsical air of the naive, like a school project or an Art Brut festival. Overlapping painted fabrics and paper-based mixed-media transcend dimensional duality. Faint but richly colorful visages hover beside semi-abstract humanoid figures that seem to waver in the windless room beside depictions of flightless birds and garden vegetables.



About halfway through *WORLBMON*, a sliding door leads out to a balcony overlooking the storied confluence where the Bosphorus strait meets the Golden Horn inlet and the Marmara Sea. The historic peninsula juts out into the bustling waters. Before the stretch of blue horizon, multilevel concrete infrastructure rises with the brutal geometry of a massive engineering feat, half-done and bare to those whose eyes are sharpened with a passion for visual art, as a vehicle for enlightened seeing.

A hammock is tied where the marine cityscape unfolds outward as a kaleidoscopic parallel to the maze of sights within the biennial venue. It facilitates upward looking, which is freshly enunciated by the sculptural works of Müge Yılmaz, who hybridizes plants, humans and animals into shapes reminiscent of prehistoric mythopoeia.

Her installation, *Eleven Suns* (2019), conveys her impressive range as a trans-disciplinary artist with a voracious appetite for feminist science fiction steeped in the origins of her nation's buried, mystifying cultural history. Yılmaz readapts visual cues from the graphic metaphors of otherworldly storytelling as they have appeared since time began, from the Anatolian plain to the Andes. With her series of handcrafted birch sculptures, she references the extinct fauna of Turkey and its petroglyph archaeology to uncover the depths of the land's untold human impact. The best known archaic rock carving site in southeast Kazakhstan is the chief muse for a tailed figure crowned with beaming concentric circles by Yılmaz titled *Tamgaly Goddess* (2019).

Ozan Atalan returns the archaic concept of the power animal back to the hard soil, also critiquing the ongoing industrial upheaval of human settlement. His installation, *Monochrome* (2019), includes a dried, well-preserved water buffalo skeleton, splayed out on a raw concrete surface. The black horns of the endangered creature, its elegant bone structure, particularly its skull, evoke the forgotten pride of a way of being lost to the imbalance of humankind in relation to its planetary ecology.

Opposite the downed, decaying water buffalo, a pair of monitors offers views of Istanbul's manufactured landscapes. Aerial drone photography contrasts the carved, dug earth, discolored and jumbled, flattened and consumed, with vanishing water buffalo habitats. The lumbering beasts graze under leafless trees to eat spotty grass and then tramp beside highways and towers in slow, unknowing herds. The mournful effect is like watching innocent victims march to their deaths.

A more tender, personalized immersion with the Biennial artists' regional surroundings is one of the many endearing qualities of artworks by Elmas Deniz, whose approach to conveying topographic change in the Anthropocene brought her back to where she grew up in Bergama, Turkey. Her meticulous research of the land's lost creeks is illustrative and conceptual, excavating Roman-era findings with an eye for perennial, naturalist beauty.

One piece, *History of a particular nameless creek [Pinna Nobilis]* (2019), exhibits shells of the Pinna Nobilis, a large species of Mediterranean clam threatened with extinction. It can grow as long as one hundred and twenty centimeters. Deniz visualized an exquisite homage to its tragic, yet angelic afterlife.

And on Büyükada, across the Marmara Sea, the artist Hale Tenger audio-spotlighted her voice as projected from a decrepit stone mansion for her installation, *Appearance* (2019). Encircling an ethereal installation of black obsidian mirrors interspersed among reflective pools in the garden of an abandoned, highland overlooking the marine ecosystem of Istanbul, her voice whispers a poem in Turkish and English. "I was a fruit tree," she recites. "I bore my fruits, I gave, without expecting reciprocity."

October 6, 11:29 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Infinity

A metaphysical space is aflame. Its conceptuality projects volatile heat. A crackling diffuses across the ether in an undying blaze as it chars the white cube soot-black. A bulbous shape burns upward against the wall, fading into an airy resonance from the low conflagration. Embers spill out over the bare, polished flooring. Gray ashes are scattered as they would be at the foot of a homey hearth, only to warn the public of an inferno, at once real and theoretical.

*Ad Infinitum* opens with a work titled, *Fire* (2017-2019) by Nasan Tur. In the broad daylight of urban chaos, as the Istanbul sun beats down relentless in the lingering fall humidity, Dirimart welcomes with a living painting, as the artist calls it, of fire and its destructive potential. While harnessing the power to set the building ablaze, Tur raises the tensions of power in relation to control.

In his essay, *Curation as Creation* for the Oct. 24, 2019 issue of *The New York Review of Books*, critic Jason Farago delights in a timely reevaluation of the role of the curator as an artist. With a sharp, historical frame, he puts curators in their place, tracing their roots to the salons from where they started to emerge into more formal exhibition halls, later galleries and museums that lionize their names as fountainheads of creativity.

“In fits and starts, the professional curator arrogated responsibilities once held by the artist, the collector, the historian, or indeed the critic, becoming the figure who assigned meaning and importance to new art: someone the art historian Bruce Altshuler has called ‘the curator as creator,’” wrote Farago, who profiled curator Harald Szeemann as having “positioned the curator as an active agent in artistic creation, perhaps even an author or an Über-artist.”

Dirimart’s Ceren Erdem concocted an inspired curation for *Ad Infinitum* by choosing to play Sarah Morris’s *Abu Dhabi* (2016) video loud enough so that its soundtrack is heard throughout the exhibition. Screened around the corner from Tur’s *Fire*, the sixty-eight-minute piece resounds to epic proportions, rhythmically akin to the layered Philip Glass compositions that accompanied the 1982 experimental film, *Koyaanisqatsi*.

And in certain ways similar to the celluloid techniques of Ron Fricke, Morris also provokes arresting visual drama out of the contrasting patterns of naturalism and urbanism. *Abu Dhabi* offers a distinctly mesmerizing artistic field of inquiry. Shot during the National Day celebrations of the United Arab Emirates, Morris chronicles the rapid modernization of the oil state from its desert isolation to hosting foreign dignitaries, and most recently, retrofitting for a cleaner world.

From the *Fire* of *Ad Infinitum*’s infinite beginnings to the *Air* (2015) of Ayşe Erkmen, captured in her series of mouth-blown glass discs, Erdem evoked the fundamental principles of material emergence in the universe, as echoed by human hands. Erkmen’s life’s work is exhibited in a mini-retrospective on the second floor of Arter’s new museum, a short walk from Dirimart. The curation of her art enjoys ample prominence in Istanbul’s revitalized Dolapdere.

Eleven transparent plates, clear and lime-hued, alternate in pyramidal order. The work emphasizes the transformative presence of the wall, as a defining aspect of spatial decisions, or curations. Against the outer world, the fire blazes, forewarning and protecting. From its anterior, the chemistry shifts its natural expression. The fragility of the glass and the visibility of the air bubbles caught inside entrain the eye to feel the dualism of power, the softness of its opposite.

Jorinde Voigt, a multidisciplinary draftsman based in Berlin, further ventures into notions of tenderness in the physical realm, using the medium of feathers as a structural surface from which to enter into more abstract, cerebral manifestations of her art practice. Educated in philosophy and modern German literature, Voigt impresses carton with ink, chalk, pastel and graphite to create a textual, numerical backdrop for her piece, *Synchronicity II*.

Erdem has a special gift for curating diagrammatic verbalism with more immediate stimuli such as color. *Ad Infinitum* is an inviting gesture, a round of introductions by the campfire punctuated by narrative hints of dramatic beauty. She offers a self-guiding palette of overlapping focuses, a compass of cyclical directions, some face-to-face, like Voigt's work against the mixed-media *Light of Memory* (2019) series by Ebru Uygun, and others side-by-side.

The flesh-colored neon glow emanating from a piece by Sarkis, titled *Spine of the Issenheim Altarpiece by Grünewald* (2017), intermingles with literal brilliance beside a print on a vinyl covering, the only transparent glass wall inside Dirimart. The adjacent piece by Lucia Koch, *We Had Enough*, injects the main room with fiery radiance. Reputed as an art world trickster, Sarkis hung a tiny crystal skull on his installation for a particularly chilling, macabre effect.

The rectangular geometry of the work by Sarkis references the sixteenth-century altarpiece, *Crucifixion* (1512-1516) by sculptor Nicholas de Hagenau and painter Matthias Grünewald, installed in France's early medieval Isenheim Monastery. His electrified, copper-flanked plasmatic neon tubes radiate with gathering intensity within the curatorial sphere of Tur's *Fire* and Koch's *We Had Enough*. Its hellish tone is attended by a woodcut of text on the work's art history.

Another young, Berlin-based artist, Alicja Kwade, conveys oblique optimism to the dark ambiance of *Ad Infinitum*. Two stainless steel hoops encircling pairs of stones and stools, titled *Eigenbahn*, infuse a sense of everlasting motion. She does not jolt the show into a sudden, sunny disposition, but seamless weaves within the cryptic plane. Her life-size bronze sculpture, *Malus Fularum*, depicting a rotten apple, complements the undead aura of burnt architecture.

At the farthest end of *Ad Infinitum*, a performance art video plays on a loop. *A Prologue* (2017) by Taldans is an exploration of dualistic repetition and the counterintuitive pleasures of its endless diversions. Conceived by artist duo Mustafa Kaplan and Filiz Sızanlı as part of another work, *Victory over the Sun* (2017) possesses apparent minimalism that unravels at its backstory's

first reading. Adapting the first Russian futurist opera, written in the movement's experimental Zaum language, the third live presentation of the work was held on Nov. 9, 2019.

The premiere of *Victory over the Sun* at the 21st Istanbul Theater Festival in 2017 marked the fifteen-year anniversary of Taldans, whose style is distinguished by the merging of the artists' engineering and architectural backgrounds. From the organic contours of the body, disciplined by timed, choreographed movements, they point, gently yet insistently, to the heart of industrial existence. And by foregrounding Russian futurism, Erdem's trail-blazing curation rolls to a full boil.

October 11, 6:50 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Ascension

The mammoth undertaking of having installed two hundred and twenty five sculptures by a hundred and forty artists since the first *Terrace Exhibition* atop the Elgiz Museum in 2012 has nearly matched the surrounding heights of vertical construction in one of Istanbul's emerging skyscraper districts, a place called Maslak, known for its layers of outdated, twentieth century industrial government factory buildings converted into inexpensive, artist studios, such as for the distinguished class of visionaries represented by Pg Art Gallery, who have furnished a bustling, inner city circle of creative action remote from its base in the downtown core, and all in high style with ongoing popup fetes amid private jumbles and neat curations of indefinable genius.

On the scaling horizon of the corporate zone that incessantly places itself on lofty pedestals of exorbitant steel, each uniformly-windowed, rectangular facade of the historic mills gradually climbs upward along the sloping, workaday periphery before a towering, reflective core of clanking steel beams heaved by soaring cranes, whose cacophonies are accompanied by the droves of mechanical engineers who detach and combine the moving parts of motor vehicles, constantly excavating and resetting the tangible, founding principles of modernism that perpetuate the runaway pace of present life into the disentangled mass ruse that has maintained the order of the day since the invention of automation over two hundred years ago, soon followed by the exponential, worldwide prevalence of artificial movement.

In contrast to the dominant, hyper mobility-based paradigm that besets and fires the contemporary worldview, there lives an unallied variety of wandering seers, those rightly named art lovers who take on every guise, from chic fashionista to cerebral introvert, as they practice a more stationary exercise in consciousness, by traveling through actual space in person to look directly at structures of novelty that forego practicality to advance purely conceptual aesthetics.

There is a secret, timeless beauty that unfolds when truly grasping new art through the emotive faculties of sight, to perceive an authentic figment of reality whose meaning is not preordained, to peer through the physique of its sculptural embodiment and admire a work for a time unmediated by the itch toward popular distractions, such as to possess it instantly by snapping a smartphone photograph, or to evade it by instead spitefully critiquing the loud ostentations of the unnatural setting, or to be attracted to whatever prestige may come with the artist's precedent.

It is an unsettling custom for most, when the consequence of a deceptively simple act as innocent and open-hearted seeing has the power to revolutionize daily, commonplace perception towards a vital embrace of visible difference in the world, and to affirm every individual's right to actualize the peculiar mental activity of personal expression within the shared, objective universe.

Sculptors are initially metaphysical engineers who root the primacy of the creative idea by building objects for the purpose of connecting souls, as opposed to repeatedly manifesting the needs and logistics of the body, as is regularly performed heavy-handedly to the detriment of the environment, polluting not only the air, but the sound and look of a thoroughly obscured nature.

The renowned sculptor Seyhun Topuz is among the earliest generation of contemporary Turkish artists within her chosen medium, shared by other living legends like the Maslak-based Kemal Tufan, and Günnur Özsoy, whose most recent solo exhibition, *Memories and Letters* bears uncanny formal resemblances to the abstract aesthetics that Topuz has lately shown from Gallery Nev Istanbul to the 4th Mardin Biennial, as well as for her current show on display at Sakıp Sabancı Museum, titled *In the Memory of Kuzgun Acar* inspired by her late colleague.

Topuz is a member of the Elgiz Museum's advisory board, and so has overseen the impressive decade of *Terrace Exhibitions*, which she respects for its singular attention to young artists in the sculpture departments of Anatolian universities. It is the case that Elgiz Museum's *Terrace Exhibition* series offers the public, and the arts scene in Istanbul, one of only a few exclusive opportunities to show large-scale, outdoor sculptures in a richly curated, group setting accessible to the public in a way largely unprecedented for the metropolitan culture's relatively disparate agglomeration of mostly small, indoor galleries.

"It's of utmost importance to mediate the dialogue between public sculptures and children, adolescents and adults in today's society; in order to revive and enrich daily life by internalizing and embracing public sculptures," she wrote, to mark the tin occasion of the tenth exhibition, *From Another Hill*.

In another ceremonial essay, Prof. Nilüfer Ergin commented on the widespread and persistent issue of artist sustainability and lack thereof, especially as it relates to sculptors in Turkey, where resources and teachers are limited, never mind the adequate funding to lead a full life dedicated to the creation of plastic art.

When we consider the lack of places for bronze founding or workshops that specialize in sculpture production with wood, metal or stone; the insufficiency of masters and education personnel in this field who are able to support all phases of contemporary sculpture; the significance of the *Terrace Exhibitions* become substantially precious.

Although a ways from the center, the Elgiz Museum is a few skips from the İTÜ Ayazağa metro stop in Istanbul, where a more hardy, well-informed flaneur separates from the globalized pack that revolves in blissful ignorance around the crowded middle of Eurasia's most blistering, nautical concrete jungle. Past an entrance promenade littered with archaist reinventions of ancient sculpture, along with futuristic impressions, the artistic ambiance prompts a healthy bout of midday contemplation in the shade of the behemoth edifices all around, many half-skeletal and dangling with unsecured frames.

A sleek elevator moves up a story and a half, as out of Charlie Kaufman's surreal cinema, through a multiplex interior of halls outfitted with a liberal bounty of curatorial vistas, passing a collection by Sevda and Can Elgiz on permanent view that has grown since the 1980s to feature a hot team of young, international artists, like Azade Köker, Tracey Emin, Hiroshi Sugito among

countless others whose mixed media ventures color and texture the halls and mezzanines with a proud scope of stylized perfectionism and experimental anti-formalism, broadly enlightening the Turkish psychological landscape with a staple institution dedicated to free and independent public appreciation for fresh, and surprisingly avant-garde creative work.

While many of the artists at *From Another Hill* were born in the 1990s, there are a few veterans like Bülent Çınar, whose exacting metal work, *Metropolitan Comfort* (2018) is charged with a human figure contorted in the vicious circle of urbanization, as the generic, rusty personal likeness is shot through with the spires of the cycling skyline, reminiscent of the Hindu belief in reincarnation, conceivably a metaphor for most people who are hopelessly locked in the earthly snarl of death and rebirth, attached to the bitter reality called Samsara, ultimately giving reason and faith enough for believers to search for the means to escape the closed wheel of insufferable existence. Departing from there, Caner Şengünel, erected his piece, *Where Did I Lose You, My Trampled Fantasies?* (2018) in stone and bronze, topped with the fine, minuscule sculpture of a man holding a pillow in his arm, ready for a grand exit from citified life.

Şengünel's is one of the special pieces at *From Another Hill* that work exquisitely with the elevated air, as the high-rises encircling provide the appropriate, dramatic reflection for a grand, emotional effect, inviting intimate seers into a subjective experience, to become absorbed in its diminished figure. After staring up with a sore neck, the voluntary exile braves a downward gaze in straightforward pursuit of an exit, no matter how unmarked, sunless, dim and low to the ground. In that spirit, the up-and-coming sculptor Furkan Depeli produced a precocious masterwork in sparkling Kemal Pasha white Bursa marble, titled, *Existence* (2016), of a man, weighed by semi-cubist blocks that protrude from his body as he lies curled up in fetal position, as one buried alive, yet seeking rebirth from the dry, stony womb of modernity's lingering, burdensome materialist dystopia.

July 29, 9:27 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Blank

The idea that art is exclusive to fine objects and public displays has long been challenged and negated. Since the dawn of conceptualism broke through the ranks of art criticism with unrivaled sway, particularly during Europe's interwar period, human invention, as intended for purely aesthetic and theoretical purposes, has assumed an uninhibited place in the realms of culture.

The elder generation of contemporary Turkish artists demonstrates a special grasp of these principles in the midst of postmodern trends. Artistic innovations that originated in the West arguably arrived late to Turkey but when they did, they were led by women, painters like Semiha Berksoy and Fahrelnissa Zeid, and the latter's niece, ceramicist Füreya Koral.

These artists pushed the envelope of Turkish art history, both within the composition and influences of their individual pieces but also by coloring outside the lines. Berksoy would lather her entire bedroom in paint. Koral expanded Turkey's traditional ceramic craft into a contemporary art practice, closing the gap between cultural institutions and the general public.

Ayşe Erkmen follows in step with her predecessors when it comes to her unique talent for inciting artful perception with a universal grab. Her works transcend media but are steeped in her pedagogical knowledge of sculpture. She is renowned for her peerless eye when integrating installations both seamlessly and counterintuitively into empty or negative space.

But unlike most artists who would seek to distract weary, curious eyes from the sterile, negative void of museum cubes and bleached galleries, Erkmen leans into the sharp corners of colorless abstraction. *Whitish* is not only a comprehensive take on her life's work but a critical assessment of Arter's new space in dialogue with art museum architecture.

If art is an old bearded man sitting on a throne of clouds, text is his thorny, red brother in the underworld. They need each other but were created at odds. The problem of visibility in conceptual art is persistent. If it is not seen, but talked about, is it art? Or text? For writers interested in textual art, these questions constantly fascinate.

Many artists, whether overtly conceptual or visual, stand behind the enigmas of immediate perception, with some more open to free interpretation than others. Identifying with the elusions of recognition lends itself to lionization. Erkmen is undaunted by the slithery wiles of text as based in calligraphic pictography. She assimilates its transformative potential.

A letter has the profound, subconscious effect of merging sight and sound. When it is embellished through an unlikely font for graphic expression, it takes on peculiar hybridity. Erkmen created a special lettering for *Whitish*, as shown via its curatorial statement on a wall introducing the multifarious works.

“As a survey exhibition, Whitish attempts to give an insight on the diversity of physical and intellectual gestures Erkmen maintains in her working processes,” reads the script, which is also a piece, *Typed Text* (2019). Its disconnected, roomy font accents the blank space required for writing language as with the silence of its vocalization.

The one hundred and twenty ink drawings on paper that comprise *Elephants, Penguins, Kiwis* (2018) parallel the illustrative dimension of *Typed Text*, with their wispy black strokes lightly emerging into vision like a child’s handwriting. The naturalist mood is set with the mineral installations *Blue Stone* (2019), from Arter’s foundation, and *100 Stones, 1981* (2015).

A figment of the animal kingdom leaps from Erkmen’s inked papers as *Frisé / Kuckuck, 2003* (2019), a taxidermic Dalmatian pelican. Its inbuilt kinesis mimics the function of a cuckoo clock, hearkening back to work Erkmen produced in 2003 for the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen in Switzerland. But it moves slowly, resembling the mystical creature in its habitat.

On the other side of a dividing wall, the big-billed fish-eating bird slides under the high ceiling of the second floor’s main hall, where Whitish is sprawled to present reconfigurations of Erkmen’s early works, going back to her freshman project from the State Fine Arts Academy’s Sculpture Department, *Plexiglass Sculptures, 1969* (2019).

The threshold from nature to art is crossed by entering through the pair of annoyingly well-disguised works, *Portiport, 1996* (2019). The metal detectors are out of place but convincing enough to blind the thoughtless without a mind to recognize their role in art history. Their motion-detecting sound element resonates with the installation, *Dolapdere* (2017).

Over six minutes of digitized voices set the tone for *Dolapdere*, which is the name of the local quarter. The piece is based on the pronunciation of shop names along the busy thoroughfare outside Arter, shared with other esteemed galleries, including Dirimart, Pilevneli and the recently opened Evliyagil. Their socioeconomic environs are deeply mixed.

“To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing,” wrote Marcel Duchamp, an early progenitor of conceptualism in art. “All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone,” he mused, channeling a refined wisdom as bold as his legendary artworks.

There is arguably no creative act in *Whitish* more cerebrally participatory than *9’04’’, 1999* (2019), which, to impatient eyes, will merely be another boring, off-white museum wall. But like the decidedly un-art-like installations of *Portiport*, but even more characteristic of Erkmen’s quirk for cool, spatial integration, *9’04’’* sets a panel of wall into deliberate motion.

*9’04’’* is discernible by shoe-gazing, a musical term for melancholic, downcast songs that inspire daydreams. And above, the click of a shutter recurs, shuffling through projections of *Slightly*,

*1997* (2019). Its ethereal spectrum emanates, magnifying the illuminated paper that Erkmen held up to a flashlight to create hazy radiations reminiscent of galactic phenomena.

“The hardest part of making art is the ambiguity of knowing what it is you’re thinking, sitting down at your desk, procrastinating with ideas like ‘perhaps I should go to a café and think there,’” Erkmen said, in response to an interview by *Whitish* curator Emre Baykal about her approach to the show.

Baykal initially proposed the concept of whitish, which has a peculiar ring in an era defined to a great extent by the racist influences of the Trump presidency. Erkmen, who produced installations in direct relationship with the spaces in which they are shown, redesigned such works as *The House (Das Haus)*, 1993 (2019), adapting Arter’s own lighting system.

*The House (Das Haus)* conveys the inherent dualism of the art show as an invitation to creative acts, but also an interference to objectivity. In the dead center of *Whitish*, five pieces of ten millimeter crude aluminum panels make up *Pleasant Corners*, offering a purely self-referential perspective on Erkmen’s oeuvre. They are like something that is not quite white, but whitish.

October 20, 1:55 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Fun

Neon signage is not as attractive as it used to be. It's long lost its glamor. But in able, creative hands, prominent international artists like Tobias Rehberger, Sarkis and Glenn Ligon frame its retro gleam with an eye for palatable aesthetic taste. In their own ways, they convey its most enduring temptations with a sense of history, of counterintuitive cultural refinement that asserts contemporary experience with quirky abandon.

With a sturdy combo of paint and acrylic on a metal structure affixed with neon tube calligraphy, the entry facade to Pilevneli's expansive, dynamic space in Dolapdere sticks out all the more, like a sore thumb. *Sometimes It's Better Than Ever* (2019) is encircled by the steep hills of Feriköy, where substandard housing exposes the wiry bowels of Istanbul's unfortunate, the elite art institution contrasts with the commercial drive, and Evangelistria Greek Church.

The maroon dome and steepled stonework of the nineteenth century place of worship is distinctive, with its bell-topped clocktower. Its mixed architectural layering is visible from inside Pilevneli, with special vantage points from the windows of every upper floor. While wolds apart, the sight is in certain ways harmonious with Rehberger's pop sculpture, as his ovular, egg-like shapes are dolloped on top of each other, sharing a precarious, stratified plurality.

*Mother Without Child 10-12* (2019) comprise three fiberglass sculptures made with epoxy and paint. Their color schemes, of milky browns, faded greens and robust reds, are as vibrantly singular as the shapes they assume, balancing a top-heavy mesmerization of inanimate interrelation between objects that confound individuality, and multiplicity. Their title evokes chicken-and-egg logic, applied to human identity. Who came first? Mother or child?

Rehberger explores nationalism through a complex, social environmentalism. His neon, curated on Pilevneli's ground floor, flickers with lexical purpose. The colors of the American flag are rendered through beams of flash, spelling out, "No", where its stars would light the tragic precedence of its postcolonial capture. The piece, *No No* (2019) opposes, *No Yes* (2019), with the latter's lettering spanning across its entire seventy-three-centimeter width.

As a play on the dualistic essentialism of political slogans, in reference to America's polarizing presidential campaigns, Rehberger's adaptations dialogue with advertising models of catchy visual entrancement. His neon has the hypnotic, electric allure of syntactic sublimation. *Freedom is Indivisible* (2019) is kinetic as its lights wink hints of critique. The first two letters of "Indivisible" are not static. Freedom is also divisible, Rehberger determines.

Alternating his approach, *Why Not Why* (2019) draws from Japanese katakana, only to fragment the lines of the syllabary script into an abstraction of raw linguistic form, or experimental "asemic writing". His eye for architecture comes forth in the piece, *No...* (2019), in which the stripes of a reconfigured American flag are transformed into bars held by a ghostly illumination of clenched fists.

In the center of Rehberger's neon is a sculpture of PU foam, epoxy resin and varnish. *Refuse* (2011) has the globular contours of a Disney character, abstracted with a cartoonish spectrum of daffodil-tipped, interdependent bulbous limbs that stretch downward over a teal body toward orange hooves. His neon gleams, *Enough is enough!* (2019) is as punchy as it is overdramatic, hanging on the wall beside the doorway into *Sometimes It's Better Than Ever*.

And going native, his visual commentary on the propaganda of American flag designs has its parallel in the floating polyurethane sculpture, *Capri Moon 3b* (2019). Unabashed in its minimalism, the LED-lit globe is an interactive survey of the red crescent as a natural and political symbol. The moon, mostly waned, and bloodshot, is emblematic of Turkish identity, especially when printed on fabric and flapping in the wind.

The beauty of *Capri Moon 3b* is its interactive depth. A seer may stroll about, circumnavigating its shifting luminescence until a perfect Turkish red crescent appears sharp against its circularity. Pilevneli curated the work with an exclusive focus, as it hovers alone in a blackened room, as in a void. In his uncanny style, Rehberger has redrawn the map of abstraction in sculpture, advancing modernist interpretation with clear, social insight.

Before his plastic series continues, *Sometimes It's Better Than Ever* displays Rehberger's talent for traditional media, apparent in his ten watercolors, which delight and provoke in equal measure with his youth-enlightened concerns. His juxtaposition of brand-name tobacco and cheap food are realist enough to turn stomachs, but these pictures of culinary chaos and health emergencies are detailed with penetrating style.

*Lucky Strike Blue Organic 11* (2019) depicts a cigarette snubbed into the middle of a lemon, which lies at the edge of a plate smeared with half-eaten food. The yellows of the citrus are accentuated and complemented by like ranges of culinary texture, the reflective skin of a sweet pepper, beside baked potatoes, a breaded piece of meat, and a wash of chive-flecked green vegetable mash.

The only likeness of human form in *Sometimes It's Better Than Ever* is the first piece in his series of works portraying morning-after disasters and nutritional nightmares. They are the couple of edgy, partially drawn mugs in his watercolor, *L & M 5* (2019). Lightly cast with tufts of pale, inky hair, the thick-rimmed glasses and weary worn eyes of the man emerge from what appears to be an intentionally unfinished work with striking realism.

His partner sports streams of thin, bluish hair, as his face from eyebrows to nose comes through the artistic divide with alarming clarity. And a cigarette dangles from the empty space where his mouth might be. They are just the kind of folk to rise to the top floor of Pilevneli for a bubble trouble rio and bounty bar, some of the fare served at Rehberger's very own cafe installation.

In step with his previous cafes, like Bar Oppenheimer in New York, or Venice Cafe, which has remained open since he started it during his show at the 2009 Biennial, the place of business features his richly original, multilayered interior designs, complete with chess sets and art magazines. *Sometimes It's Better Than Ever* does have a November closing date, but until then, gallery staff and art lovers are kicking back with uninhibited abandon in Dolapdere, and they want more.

October 27, 2:18 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Dueling

An audience, by definition, refers to the sense of hearing. To be a member of an audience is to invite the auditory, in a sense. However, the powers of sight, touch, and spatial awareness are equally integral to the experience of *offroad, v.2*, the latest kinetic, multimedia installation by French artist Céleste Boursier-Mougenot.

Prior to entering the black-on-black hall which hosts the piece, which sees three grand pianos repeatedly drift into one other via a computerised, electromechanical system, the curatorial statement on the entrance wall invites seers to step into the "pianos' territory."

Moving objects occupy territory, expanding and contracting in sporadic confrontation. These dynamics apply to worldly concern, but that does not appear to be the focus for Boursier-Mougenot, whose entirely eccentric work defers to more interior dimensions.

*offroad, v.2* has the effect of comedic relief, loosening the generally confused tension of the abstract, modern art environment. Like a viral video, his installation is irresistibly watchable because it is also completely baffling.

Selen Ansen curated the show with the support of the Istanbul French Cultural Institute. Her invitation extends to audience members who may choose to view the mechanized, anarchic clash of antique grands from above, to contemplate their connections.

For Ansen, whose academic background is thoroughly steeped in the French milieu, there is a drift to catch in the art of Boursier-Mougenot. And by bringing him to Turkey, she has also presented the momentum of her curatorial sway.

Ansen first worked with Arter in 2012, as a guest curator inviting the work of Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere. While Turkish is not her mother tongue, her ability to cross the divides that bind Turkey and Francophone Europe are a fundamental asset to Istanbul's culture sector.

"Although the notion of 'roots' is problematic for me, I can also feel how much this city has nourished my perceptive and sensory experience with its cultural and historical diversity and dynamism," she said of Istanbul in an interview with *Exhibist* editor Anna Zizlsperger.

The refreshing palate of *offroad, v.2* is its generous lavishing of empty space. The knock of hardwood resonates through the soundboards of the pianos that whirl and rock with uncontrollable, inelegant flux.

A spinning anemometer on Arter's fourth floor terrace is said to interact with the pianos, affixed thanks to the technical contributions of Guilhem de Gramot, a specialist in electro-mechanics, as well as Guilhem Saurel, a robotics engineer from the French LAAS-CNRS laboratory.

Boursier-Mougenot is famed for his contribution to the 2015 Venice Biennial, in which he transformed all precedence for the Neoclassical French Pavilion with his arboreal soundscape based on research into the Italian Mannerist gardens.

Electricity was his muse, but in dialogue with nature. His collaboration with scientists has been a staple in his installations. This approach is patent in his interior investigation through the medium of the otherwise stationary furniture of the acoustic piano.

But as all pianists know, the ambiance is as important as the instrument itself, in some cases more so. For example, in 1975, Keith Jarrett began *The Köln Concert* fraught over the venue's choice of piano only to perform the best-selling solo album in jazz history.

Unlike the American improviser, Boursier-Mougenot decided, after studying saxophone and violin, that he was not an instrumentalist. He next ventured into theater, set design, and lighting, inspired by the avant-garde dramaturgy of Pascal Rambert.

*offroad, v.2* displays the mind of a failed musician who crept into the backstage of experimental theater with production ideas all of his own. Eerie pulses of string-like reverberation dangle overhead as the black and brown pianos embrace, coalesce and break apart.

The silent, artificial construct echoes with torrents of howling noise, scratchy clicks and lingering pops. An invisible dance of lush choral screeching blows past, as the pianos wrestle, caught in a tangle of their rounded triangular physique.

Barbara A. MacAdam, an editor of *ArtNews*, identified Boursier-Mougenot as an “accidental composer” in her 2015 profile. For her research, she observed one of his pieces, which included aviary finches on harpsichord strings and wire hangers fixed with microphones.

For another of his peculiar creations, titled *harmonichaos 2.1* (2006), he integrated tuners, harmonicas, light bulbs and vacuum cleaners. The enumeration refers to incarnations and offshoots of concepts and attempts. He builds on past works like a metaphysical sculptor.

*offroad, v.2* was shown in its earliest form in 2014 during the *les Abattoirs* exhibition, one of France's most influential art events. But in that show, he added a drum set, placed in a reflective pool with a cosmic-ray detector to trigger a waterfall's crashing onto it.

The music that ensues throughout the showcasing of his installations, many of which ongoing for over a decade, has been compared to the transcendent wash of tones that issued from such immortalized composers as Erik Satie, or Debussy.

Boursier-Mougenot affirms the ways in which art and science are subject to change, and, in fact, are defined by proofs of argument and contradiction as the very measures by which to advance their methods and findings among collectives of practitioners.



The pianos curated inside Arter's Karbon room are set to continuously gyrate in a ghostly manner until mid-December. The architecture, spare to the point of austere, parallels that of a closed grand piano, repurposed into an opaque, solely percussive object.

That blunting of high culture is a fundamental point of departure for contemporary artists like Boursier-Mougenot, also a nominee of the 2010 Marcel Duchamp Award. Arguably, the chief intent is to imbue the mundane world with the radical universality of modern art.

If technology is as pervasive as its pace of development in the postindustrial paradigm, art follows close behind, as a critical observer, poking fun as much as poking alternatives and modes of resistance and invention to offset the impositions of mainstream monoculture.

Or, as Boursier-Mougenot might tempt, there are other ways, "offroad" from the normal order of being, which humanity may utilize through its power to create, unsurpassed in nature, whether consciously for the positive, or mindlessly, and so, catastrophically.

The sound of pianos knocking together is like a Zen koan, reminiscent of John Cage's approach to composition. His teacher Arthur Schoenberg said he had no feeling for harmony, and that he would come up against a wall. "I'll beat my head against that wall," Cage replied.

November 3, 7:03 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Study

A rough wood sculpture gnarls upward from its winding, naturalistic trunk, smoothed with painstaking attention to the lines of its engraving. An unlikely blossom of tubular, oblong shapes ascends from its risen root, suspended with a surrealist sense of gravity. But using a lime shade of otherworldly, bright green, artist Nilhan Sesalan created, *Dream of the Wood* (2017). Its primitivist archaism, merged with contemporary vision, is akin to the primitivist wood sculpture of Burcu Erden, or the monumental animism of Kemal Tufan.

With forms reminiscent of the alien typology of H.R. Giger, and further explored by Memo Kösemen in his evolutionary fantasy, *Choose Only One Master — Nature* includes a mixed media on fixated canvas by Kösemen, also an author of research on the gravestone aesthetics of Turkey's Dönme, or Crypto-Jews. His show at Space Debris in early 2018 unveiled his prolific output, inspired by entomological fascination and a photographic memory. *Arferis* (2019), in Dolapdere, sets his invented creatures in a fictive wonderland.

If artists could travel through time, and their works reproduce, the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and the filmmaking of Tim Burton would have a happy childhood raised in the imagination of Kösemen. Young people are the focus of Raziye Kubat, whose trio of mixed media works on paper follow a geography of earthly direction. Centered is a chilling portrait of climate activist Greta Thunberg, whose facial skin is boiling, as she looks with a piercing gaze across the museum floor at a red hot archival pigment photograph print on metallic paper.

Ali Kabaş heightens the perspective, and curator Beral Madra placed his work up on the wall, craning necks. It is a powerful juxtaposition of images, the protruding nose of a plane thunders in view of the highest mountain peak on the planet. *Everest* (1999) is less an exciting panorama than a critical window on the vantage point of man's having one-upped and conquered nature.

Other children painted by Raziye Kubat have a less intimidating poise, such as in *Northeast* (2019), seasonally appropriate, where a triad of boys in winter wear surf mystically on the back of a whale in a seascape of powdery light. Kubat paints backgrounds with a talent for abstract expressionist texture. And her *Southeast* (2019) is contrasted with its emergence of sharp neon colors. Her linear strokes are loud, like the visual art of Miles Davis. Her shadows are subtle, and architecture exacting.

The play of scenography continues in the oils of Eşref Üren, whose piece, *Environs of Ankara (Snow)* (1973) is a modernist miniature celebrating life in the Anatolian capital when its rolling landscape whitens in the subzero warmth of communal togetherness. Thin figures amble about between stands of yellow and blue trees, walking to and from green and red houses in an open, preindustrial countryside. Almost fifty years ago, when Üren painted the work on hardwood, Ankara was bucolic as ever, with its remote, familial pastimes.

Serhat Kiraz translated the Turkish word, “Yok,” which can mean simply no or also absent, as “non,” for his wood triptych, *YOK / non-...* (2019). The geometric precision of its unfinished paneling, impressed with darkened lettering and off-centered concentric circles places linguistic design in an earthy milieu. The rustic look of its renovated historicism pairs in contradistinction with a sculptural work by Handan Börüteçene. Fusing a tree fossil, organic glass and a metal wheel, the extraterrestrial mould of *Untitled* (2013) has a superhuman lure.

The mood becomes macabre in the hands of Sadık Arı, whose ink drawings on paper approach the mastery of a medievalist enlightenment in the vein of Northern Renaissance engraver Albrecht Dürer. In arrangements of two and four, *The Raid* (2016) is a powerfully direct confrontation with human burial. From an empty earthen womb, to lain flesh, and finally skeletons, Arı, with his spare, dichromatic palette, details the integration of life embodied through the round of being, from potent emptiness, into animate form, and back to free space.

In his series of naturalist dualities, *Diptychs IV*, photographer and graphic designer Ahmet Elhan entered the magic realms of waterfall ecologies. Within his portrayals, he frames his focus with overlapping geometries, similarly applied by Kiraz, yet without the circularity. And in common with Arı, his austere shades of black and white vary only slightly, but imposingly with a stark, artificial accents of faded digital beige and cold machine blue. By its contours alone, nature has a recurring profile in its infinite multiplicity of manifestations.

A collagist’s reckoning of tree bark gives way to a vacant, internal expanse at its heart, suggestive of the female body beneath its core. The archival pigment print by Can Akgümüş, *Hider Series* (2018) closely observes the rough textures of anthropomorphic arboreality like a paper cutout, yet, like the works of Arı and Elhan, it is colorless. Its discernible form conveys the principle of nature as feminine, and so, subject to the toxic machinations of man. Finally, aged beyond death, its mythic seduction is petrified by a synthetic veneer.

Known for her allegorical, indoor gardening, Sibel Horada adapted the basic shape of the landmark tradition of multilayered stone cairns, traditionally built by the indigenous peoples of the North American Arctic. *Shaped by Water* (2019), an installation of styrofoam, had Horada relaying the vast aesthetic gulf between superficial construction, and its symbolism, with that of the apparent chaos and artless disposition of the cosmos in relation to its individuated figments that, according to ancient myth, long broke from the holism of creation.

In a primarily visual field, especially in exhibition spaces curated for the act of seeing, literary approaches are a welcome refresh from the ambiguity of meanings found through objects alone. Güven İncirlioğlu, of the Xurban collective, contributed a book, “past, simple: notes on a future catastrophe,” on display at the second-floor loft in Evliyagil Dolapdere. Printed in İzmir province in August, the work is a crucial addition to Xurban’s house philosophy.

Founded in 2000 as a transatlantic project with New York-based artist and researcher Hakan Topal, İncirlioğlu translates his expertise in art theory and photo-mechanical materials to

ecological literature. In certain ways comparable to the linguistics art of Elmas Deniz, “past, simple” is the result of a year-long work-in-progress, detailing notes by the artist, with ambient imagistic cues, on the sociopolitical topics of neoliberalism, environmentalism and urbanism.

“Through consumption, the object becomes ephemeral,” writes İncirlioğlu, an apt lead from which to approach the final piece of *Choose Only One Master — Nature*, behind a back room, out of view, but through the entering of multiple interiors. There are two *Untitled* (2012) works by Handan Börüteçene, both made of a lemon, pomegranate, lightbulb, glass bell jar and marble. It is through the looking glass of natural decomposition where the future emerges.

November 10, 2:32 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Chronology

Leading curators Emre Baykal and Eda Berkmen plumbed the depths of Arter, and also Turkish art history, in preparation for the show, *What Time Is It?*, an interrogative comment on Istanbul's current milieu. Arter has grown in the last decade from a collection of four hundred works to nearly one thousand three hundred and fifty while successfully transitioning from an elegant apartment on Istiklal Avenue to what has arguably become Istanbul's first mainstream, contemporary art museum in Dolapdere quarter.

The precedence of Istanbul Modern and institutions like Salt and Pera Museum are outstanding, as is the near-parallel unveiling of the Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture, but it is only at Arter where locals and travelers through Istanbul's art world may enter into a domain reminiscent of MoMA or Tate. The question that Baykal and Berkmen are asking, backed by seasoned retrospective scholarship, is both pragmatic and philosophically abstract.

Time, even in its linear form, is cyclical. It is steeped in repetition and monotony. Months, hours, days, minutes, seconds and the mechanics of the clocks that bind them in all their mundane ordinariness speak to a myth of eternal return, a recurring *deja vu* that goes unrecognized under the blinding lights of daily consciousness. And yet, while generally thought of as utterly normal, the measure of solar movement is merely symbolic, a human contrivance.

In the context of Turkish cultural history, no conversation about time is complete without Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, a nonpareil literary voice from the early twentieth century equally empowered by reason and absurdism. His 1954 book, *The Time Regulation Institute*, is a staple for anyone's curiosity, and with a sense of humor enough to stomach a bitter, darkly comic satire on the modernization reforms that Turkey endured from empire to republic.

“An unregulated timepiece would drive this otherwise mild-mannered man to despair,” Tanpınar wrote, of his character Nuri Efendi, who is struck with a peculiar case of chronophobia. But observing the rest of society, Tanpınar concludes:

Sometimes I consider just what strange creatures we are, we bemoan the brevity of our lives but do everything in our power to squander this thing we call ‘the day’ as quickly and mindlessly as we can.

The passage of time defines public art appreciation. An indefinite search for objects with no apparent meaning, that swing between egoist projection and selfless obsession, is not widely considered the best use of a fleeting lifespan. But the enigmas of contemporary art have the potential to vitalize with alternative wisdom greater than human longevity, particularly when specified by a nation on the fringe of Eurocentric art criticism, collection and historiography.

Many artists whose works are on display for *What Time Is It?* are, in fact, central to the contemporary art landscape of European capitals, such as Berlin, a veritable Turkish city within

Germany's laudable project of universalizing nation-building beyond identity politics. While part of an expansive sound and sculpture installation at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Istanbul's mischief-maker Cevdet Erek returns with three works at Arter.

*Father's Timeline* (2007) represents the interplay of politics and personal histories in the life of a mid-century Turkish man. The rudimentary aesthetic evokes a child's perspective, attempting to listen to his parents' life story. The visual style recalls indigenous calendars based on seasons or the lack of strict timekeeping in non-Western societies. Wars, prophecies and migrations indicate a relationship with the past that is more personal and memorable.

The show encompasses artists who have contributed to the international prestige of Istanbul's collections despite a vacuum of European classicism or of twentieth-century masters. But what Turkey lacks for medievalists and modernists, it makes up for its otherwise gross gap in permanent acquisition with postwar visionaries of the contemporary. The preeminent figure in early video art, Nam June Paik is a welcome name in Dolapdere.

*French Clock TV* (1989) places a hard accent on the archaism of the clock as a vintage phenomenon lost to the prevalence of multi-use gadgetry. Anything that only does one thing has become obsolete, but Paik unravels an individualized perspective through the plural, malleable lens of video. The camera, fixed to a tripod, unmoving in front of the clock, projects the presence of a constant viewer, one impatiently waiting, or rushing before the end of the day.

The installation by Sarkis, *Çaylak Sokak, 1986* (2019), marks a momentous return for the artist who has made Paris his home since 1966. After thirty-three years since its debut, *Çaylak Sokak* is again shown in Istanbul, and it depicts the city's Talimhane district, where Sarkis was born and raised. The piece, which has become a treasured asset of Arter's permanent collection, includes an architectural model of the artist's family house, coated in gold.

*An Icon* (2010) completes the round of personal history that Sarkis has instilled with his signature sly for the exhibition, *What Time Is It?*, also defining his life's work to a great extent by remounting *Çaylak Sokak*. He has emptied his childhood home and gilded it with the inventive quality of memory as creative inspiration. Baykal's book-length essay on *Çaylak Sokak* compares his visual allegory to Marcel Proust and Rainier Maria Rilke.

"In *An Icon*, Sarkis summons up the war years from his childhood memories, recalling the nights of blackouts punctuated by the sounds of planes; but rather than bury the house in the darkness of night and war, he covers it with gold leaf, makes it glitter like a holy sanctuary," writes Baykal.

Although it's staged with objects that doubtlessly belong to a remarkably personal history... there's something about *Çaylak Sokak* that has to do with ourselves.

Fans whir overhead, emulating the rush of an air raid, which Sarkis might have remembered, if only subconsciously, as a preschool child in the Istanbul of the early 1940s. What he does recollect, as corroborated with friends and relatives, was the ubiquitous sight of carpets hanging over windows to camouflage residential exteriors and dampen sirens. A piece by Serge Spitzer, *Golden Carpet* (1995) complements his work like a closed book.

Only slightly fallen from the windowsill but rolled up and perched at the bottom of a clear window between Arter's multi-floor galleries, *Golden Carpet* prompts an unanswerable question, as the textile remains unseen. In certain ways, the work and its curation is a viable response to the title of the exhibition, *What Time Is It?*, in dialogue with Sarkis. The world has changed since the eldest alive were children, but history's traumas persist, however obscured.

November 18, 12:40 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Constitution

The symbol of the Turkish lira weighs heavily. Its concrete form lays awkwardly over bare, hard flooring. Fake seaweed grows along its inflexible features, in between the double dash and from its straight, rectangular top, down to the end of its rounded tail. It is about half-covered in living matter. The effect is that of a symbol, made to manifest in the substance that maintains its existence. Yet, there is neglect, an unconcern that looms above it like a mist, giving rise to an invasive species of vegetation.

Gökçen Ataman stood above her piece, *Untitled* (2019), and contemplated its conceptual abstraction against its literally concrete presence. A symbol, it seemed, could project an absolute figment of reality, a presence in the world so definite that it shadows all that has come before, and all that might take place. She had only finished installing her first solo show minutes before and was proud and excited. Her gallerist at the REM Art Space, Mehmet Kahraman, walked out of the spare interior satisfied, with a forward-thin air.

“We have an urge to cling to new surroundings, and this makes us concerned about creating new living spaces,” wrote Kahraman, in a text accompanying the show, titled, ironically, *Welcome to a Prestigious Life*.

Promised a prestigious life, we are faced with a crooked and unstable city that has transformed into a monotype. Societies should be urbanizing with an appreciation of their history not to lower the city aesthetics.

He went on to describe the “betrayal of history” that, to him, has become contemporary urban life. Ataman could barely contain her excitement, anticipating her opening the next day. In a way, her emotional relativity to the work she had created stood akin to the introductory series of untitled sculptures by the storefront gallery window.

Whether meticulously columned with miniature planks of wood, making for a sort of treehouse on stilts, or having erected stout concrete shells of model industrial buildings, the structures burst with the tendrils and leaves of the *Hedera helix*, a long, viny hanging plant.

She divided her exhibition temporally. The future is at the beginning, in which derelict properties crawl with contrasting wildness. In her mind, politics and ecology are part of a continuum within a mass chain of consumption. But it is a linear progression, and like recorded time, has a built-in expiration date. The present, represented by works installed at the back of the show, is fixed in an isolated, closed-cycle of decomposition. The REM Art Space has only one door for guests to enter and exit. It is a fitting dynamic to follow Ataman’s visual narrative.

The future is closer to the past than the present is to either. Hanging on the wall above the largest contiguous installation of sculptures, the Turkish lira reappears. It is caked with tacky, sparkling glitter. A flimsy display of cardboard, painted in the gunmetal gray of concrete is arrayed in



stacked boxes, held up with thin wooden sticks. *Welcome to a Prestigious Life* climaxes in the realization of a miniature high-rise fantasy, inelegantly but effectively repurposed to convey her idea. A gilded residential house stands atop, raising the Turkish flag.

Ataman holds a degree from the Department of Sculpture at Hacettepe University in Ankara, where not long before she graduated and where the Frankfurt-based artist duo Özlem Günyol and Mustafa Kunt earned the academic reputation that would drive them to the heart of Germany's conceptualist art landscape.

They have also repurposed currency in their work, such as in their series "Materialistic Paintings" at Dirimart, in which the two diaspora artists utilized various types of metal for different coins sized in proportion to their value.

After growing plants in her home for over a year, Ataman gained indoor gardening experience especially in preparation for her show. She chose to use forest plants, for their uncultivated character. Most of the wood that she has used is found material, also prompting a more unrefined aesthetic in contradistinction with the foundations, walls and the ceilings of sculpted buildings. Sometime in mid-2018, she started visiting the REM Art Space with installation ideas. When it came together in October, she felt the installation turned out better than planned.

The main, centerpiece of *Welcome to a Prestigious Life* is a mass of half-constructed projects in the style of Turkey's state housing programs, known as TOKİ. The architecture is unmistakable, a vision of modernism à la Le Corbusier, essentially detached from the ground, upward and, in practice, isolationist. Her work, particularly when framed as two-dimensional wood-panel sculptures, recalls life in the coastal slums along the Amazonian and in South Asia in places like Iquitos or Ho Chi Minh City.

The projects that Ataman represents in her installation work on TOKİ has a ramshackle appearance, based on her evaluation of Bursa's cityscape. Jenga-like in their uncoordinated, graceless embodiment of urban architecture, a piece lies fallen and fragmented. It is a wonder how they stand. And to add a touch of Turkish humor, she has impressed their surfaces with Ottoman-style geometric patterns as a comment on the pseudo-cultural attractors that would compel buyers from near and far to invest in new, risky developments.

For the past five years, Ataman has created new works. Her venture toward her current practice as an artist began when she had a child. Instead of burdening her with domestic duties, the experience has freed her to pursue art. In that sense, while her professional biography is not extensive, she maintains a genuine focus, supported by her education, which she continued after Ankara in the program of Graphic Design at the Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Canada.

Ataman is a naturalist researcher, tramping through the Belgrade Forest in Istanbul's verdant northwest for the roots, greenery and general ecological ambiance that she seeks, portraying

uninhibited overgrowth. And between industrial construction and free naturalism, she also adds a touch of cultural specificity, whether it's a small evil eye or a painted relief of Islamic geometry. Her work is reminiscent of Salvador Dali's *The Elephants* (1948), the witch's house in the Tim Burton film *Big Fish* (2003) or Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004).

“In Turkish systems, we always build, build, build, but without infrastructure. We always try to build bigger and higher, with glitter and splendor, but not the most reliable. And we put something religious or nationalist,” said Ataman.

If you think of this as a city that was once there, and then humankind disappeared, but the buildings are still there with the plants over them. If you don't build infrastructure that's what happens. It's a scenario I built.

November 25, 10:09 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Pulse

In line with the 16th Istanbul Biennial, Turkish artist Elmas Deniz reflected on the loss of aquatic ecosystems along the coast of her hometown Bergama, which lies just outside İzmir on the site of the ancient city of Pergamon. Bergama has maintained a quintessentially Hellenic charm, having worked hard to preserve its wealth of Grecian cultural artifacts.

*Lost waters* (2019) is a three-dimensional wooden relief which opens the pathway to a raw, extinct territory, its contours laid bare. Its linear display of man-made etchings give the piece the feel of an excavation site, with thick streams of black running throughout its contours forming an outline along the landscape.

Cevdet Erek, a fellow Istanbul-based artist, similarly drew inspiration from Bergama for his latest work, which is now displayed in the heart of Europe's contemporary artistic hub: Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof.

Based on the ancient Greek word "stereo" – which originally meant "solid" – the thirty-four-channel composition *Bergama Stereo* is a site-specific adaptation of the ancient Pergamon Altar, particularly its best-known frieze depicting various giants and gods. In contrast to Deniz's ecological focus, Erek chose to rediscover the context of Bergama's living, human soundscape.

The contributions of both Greek and German civilizations continue to have a marked impact on Western identity thanks to their mutual leanings toward rooted philosophy, lofty architecture and infrastructural achievements – whether in the form of temple columns or the masculine brawn of industrial design. Whether by their ancient colonizing ambitions or modern experiments with imperialism, respectively, the two nations have had an entangled, interdependent relationship with Anatolian lands and peoples throughout their history.

Thus, it is only natural then that Bergama, or Pergama, shares its name with one of Germany's most prestigious cultural institutions, the Pergama Museum. In Berlin, it is through the arts, arguably, in which social leadership expresses universal humanism through minority representation with unparalleled conviction, as compared to less enlightened, more isolationist fields of professional and public engagement.

There is no landmark quite like the Pergamon Altar, built in the second century B.C., which has since resumed and been taken to be put on display in Berlin's Collection of Classical Antiquities – the jewel in the crown of museum island, attracting throngs to the European capital ever since its first unveiling in 1901. In the visionary style of a Hellenistic epic, the deities of Olympus and monsters of the underworld wage eternal war between its solemn, marble columns.

Cevdet Erek has reformulated this mythological struggle into a sonic metaphor. Approaching the multilayered block of cubes, and mounting its stairway up to a raised platform overlooking the expanse of the Hamburger Bahnhof interior, *Bergama Stereo* pulses with Berlin electronica and

Turkish dance percussion from the Bergama region. Ereğ specifically accented the double-headed *davul* bass drum, a traditional ingredient of every rural festival (not to mention a wake-up tool for the groggy to eat before dawn during Ramadan). The mix makes for a jarring, chaotic cocktail of reverberations, akin to the thunderous forces of spiritual conflict.

*Bergama Stereo* is housed inside the vast acoustical space of the Hamburger Bahnhof, originally inaugurated in 1846 as a train station connecting Berlin and Hamburg. It has since become the only rail station in Germany preserved from the mid-nineteenth century – coincidentally, not long before German and Turkish archaeologists began working together to dig the Pergamon Altar from the storied soil of Turkey's Aegean coast. The architect and railwayman Friedrich Neuhaus designed its plush, Neoclassical interior.

Just as silence can be as essential an element of music as the notes being played, so empty space is required for the resonance of tone. In the hangar-like vastness of the Hamburger Bahnhof, individuals sit on small benches, families and friends saunter along, snap photos and stare into the blank ether, as the *davul* drum echoes like a wayward spirit at the end of a techno rave, vibrating softly from the austere, blunt construction Ereğ has invited us into; its bare, rectangular aesthetic blending seamlessly with the site-specific architectural context.

While the Pergamon Altar is currently under renovation, slated to reopen in 2023, Ereğ's piece entices interest in the archaeological masterwork. Also initiating a performance series at Hamburger Bahnhof, which will run through March, he will also be collaborating on fusion soundscapes with Gökhan Deneç, a dab-hand at quadrophonic technology, along with Saba Arat, a guitarist and psychologist. In May 2018, Deneç performed at İTÜ's Maçka campus in central Istanbul, projecting pale noise, pops and clicks over an embattled aerial night scene.

A dichromatic spectral scheme of white and black alternate between squares of loudspeakers and their casings. The type and volume of the sounds they emit vary according to the listener's proximity. When close, certain speakers play minimalist rhythms, like a metallic ticking that repeats over a tight pattern in dialogue with sequences ritually beaten onto the *davul* drum in their crudest, most basic form. From afar, the expanse of Hamburger Bahnhof fills with the loose, muffled skin of a bass drum struck slowly, so as to extend its resound.

In the last twenty years, since 1999, a curatorial alliance has mounted, "Works of Music by Visual Artists", a series of interdisciplinary coproductions at Hamburger Bahnhof, including participation from the Nationalgalerie, Freunde Guter Musik Berlin, e.V., and Ruhrtriennale. Through the winter, Ereğ will stand together with Deneç and Arat to combine the techniques of unplugged acoustic percussion and electronic beat music into new adaptations of Turkish and German music as it is heard and made in Berlin.

For the 2017 Venice Biennial, Ereğ conceived that year's Turkish Pavilion. His work, *ÇİN*, tackled pre-conceptualization, experimentation and improvisation as departure points from which he conceived his architectural sound installation as an onomatopoeic allegory. *ÇİN* resembles

*Bergama Stereo* in certain ways. Its centralized staircase, and panel-like verticality, plural yet unified, bears the mark of the artist's mind. He had attempted to build a structure with visible, but inaccessible features.

The idea of *ÇIN* was to consider how sound permeates themes and manifestations of intervention and occupation. In like-minded fashion, the acoustics of the Hamburger Bahnhof have been altered with Erek's installation in direct correlation to the number of people present, and their physical activity. It is a salient comment during a time when the giants and the gods of the Pergamon remain at war, yet, like the bureaucrats of EU immigration, are concealed behind an institutional order that has been passed down from the ancients.

December 1, 3:15 PM  
Berlin, Germany

## Earth

Through the looking glass on İstiklal Avenue in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, totems and figures of otherworldly creatures stare wide-eyed back at the human world. Intricate whorls of gleaming texture reflect off the works of Malene Hartmann Rasmussen in the storefront window of Meşher to introduce curious eyes to a curation by Catherine Milner and Károly Aliotti titled *Beyond the Vessel: Myths, Legends, and Fables in Contemporary Ceramics around Europe*.

It is the opening presentation of the historic building that formerly housed Arter since transformed into an adaptation of the Ottoman Turkish concept for an exhibition space. Entering through a side door, and setting out from a balconied stairway, the visionary ecology of Kim Simonsson appears immediately. Its immersive ambiance is entrancing. The sight of its forest sprites evokes the wonder and fascination of the mind in concert with nature.

Child-like effigies, cloaked and hooded in velvet green moss, stand and greet newcomers with stares, some unflinchingly confrontational, others wayward, downcast and meek, peering into a dimension budding and teeming with an order of natural growth unknown to city dwellers. The autumnal color scheme of a plant wall hangs delicately over the woodland beings, proudly adorned in a sophisticated complex of athletic garments.

Feathered and long-haired, one of the little ones holds a tall glass crystal in the palm of their hand. They peer over the edge of fallen bark, ferns, bushes and stone, their lichenous skin overgrown up their legs, their mouth obscured by verdurous tendrils. The far-flung soul offers a symbol of power from the heart of creation. It is a remnant of purity, from a plane of existence in which humanity coexists in seamless, visual harmony with its surroundings.

In the Pacific Northwest, indigenous people built totems as physical manifestations of the spirit of the land in continuity with a local family heritage. The idea was to establish a continuous line of ancestral linkage with mystical forces embodied by the chimerical animals of a community's folklore. *Fantasma (Ghost)* (2019) by Malene Hartmann Rasmussen conceives the totemic tradition with a contemporary twist. At the bottom, the lidless gaze of a dog smiles under a golden head, its eyes closed and mouth open to reveal rows of sharp teeth.

*Fantasma (Ghost)* is topped by a gilded egg, its polished surface reflecting the neon light of an overcast moonscape behind the assemblage of misfit beasts and winsome pets. But following the sequence of eyes, the piece has a bold logic, expressing the internalization of creative self-representation. From the dumbstruck dog, the meditative humanoid, to a person's likeness covered in white hair, and finally crowned with an ovum, the work projects esoteric wisdom, illustrating stages of spiritual identity.

The mastery that Rasmussen demonstrates with ceramic detail is nonpareil while bearing aesthetic resemblance to Simonsson. One work, *Kelp Man* (2018) drapes a bust in filaments of dark green. Its lush abundance appears as born from the same world as that which Simonsson

fashioned, only in a colder, more isolated light. The symbolic resonance of the egg returns atop a mystical reindeer head. *The Egg Hunter* (2019) captures the sensation of winter equinox as a tongued refresh of the sacred season.

The assemblage of the artists' works at *Beyond the Vessel* bear a thematic and technical harmony that, at times, seems utterly premeditated. The hanging sculpture, *Ornamental Chronology* (2019) by Phoebe Cummings is just a single example. Its fibrous tethers complement the fantastical environment of Simonsson, only it exudes a more decomposed air, leading to the macabre installation *On the Beach* (2019) by Vivan van Blerk.

Where the cartoonish and cinematic dreamlands of Simonsson and Rasmussen may recall whimsical pop culture references to the Island of Misfit Toys in the animation film, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, or the Lost Boys of Steven Spielberg's *Hook* adaptation of *Peter Pan*, there is a sinister, post-apocalyptic tinge of poignancy to Blerk's multivalent artwork. *Beyond the Vessel* begins welcomingly, yet quickly turns solemn, even horrifying.

The bricks of Beyoğlu, once the toast of Istanbul's turn-of-the-century architectural modernism emerge from the sand of *On the Beach*, a wasteland strewn with plastic bottles, fragile miniatures of endangered species and headphone-wearing skulls. The irony is not lost despite the pitch dark metaphor piled against a backdrop picturing the concrete shells and blasted domes of a devastated urban infrastructure.

Blerk's installation is reminiscent of a contribution to Istanbul's 16th Biennial by the Amsterdam-based Peruvian artist Claudia Martínez Gray. Her piece, *The Creator* (2019), set twenty clay pieces in a mound of sand, representing the culture of the Moche civilization, which vanished over a thousand years ago, yet is at the center of controversies over looted archaeological art in foreign museums. Blerk added a distinctive edge to the morbid, lifeless scene, accenting her skulls with ceramic details for a barnacle-like, textural temporality.

During a group exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, titled *Eco-Visionaries*, critic Oliver Wainwright concluded his review for *The Guardian* with resigned sarcasm, noting an artist collective, Rimini Protokoll who highlighted the fact that, while human life is at risk, jellyfish are benefitting from climate change. The floating sea turtles and aqueous colors of Blerk's installation conveys a nebulous beauty imparted by ensuing global tragedies.

A fragment of the wall depicting the skeletal remains of a city in *On the Beach*, leads behind to a small room. Inside is a powerful work by Bouke de Vries, *The Last Supper* (2019), centering the infamous image of an atomic explosion on a dinner table. The delicacy of ceramics, shattered to countless shards, contrasts with the gentility of the sit-down affair. In an edgy style comparably relayed by the Turkish artist Halil Altindere, the gold-plated silverware assumes the shape of automatic weaponry.

The juxtaposition of violence and civilization is a staple theme for artists interested in the tension between creation and destruction. Art is a means to provoke drama in a still moment, whether through graphic, plastic or digital media. *Beyond the Vessel* proves that ceramics are as malleable and fluid as any material, or technology in the practice of visualizing approaches and concepts that crystallize private knowledge into public experience. And more, the works of Rasmussen, Simonsson, Cummings, Blerk and Vries encompass merely the first of three floors.

December 9, 10:54 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Line

Among the Islamic arts, calligraphy holds unrivaled sway. Its craft, essentially a mix of visual art and writing, relays the inceptive, oral history of the Quran as a stylistic tradition of linguistic expression. Since the literal meaning and interpretations of the words are second to its emotive spirit, it affirms the human holism of its message within an emblem of supernatural beauty.

Islamic calligraphy is a call to see the sacred nature of writing as a medium that encompasses visuality and artistry while maintaining the direct clarity of focus instilled by speech, with its force and potential as a vehicle of history and ideas. The script of Arabic had only developed in fragmentary fits and started before the Quran fell from the tongues of reciters to the palms of scribes by the middle of the seventh century.

The ability to make words visual was itself a revelation to the first generations of Muslims who saw calligraphy and its allure a potential not only to perpetuate and codify their scripture but to entice new readers. Manuscripts became only one of many means to enchant young souls while glorifying Islamic culture. Like the Greco-Roman custom of engraving, early Arabs decorated holy sites, public buildings and domestic spaces.

In old Islamic societies, books, and consequently literary production, held a special place for everyone, from the manual laborer poring over a memorized text, to the diplomatic gift of a sultan in the interest of impressing a foreign dignitary. Religious orders, particularly those following Mevlana Rumi believed in calligraphy's mystical power. A phrase, when drawn with reverent devotion, could manifest the ideals of faith into a worldly experience.

Assimilating and speaking to multilingual masses was the key ingredient to Islam's influence. For the ruling people, calligraphy served a political end. Its look could arrest the illiterate into submission, and for scholars and students, it was simultaneously educative. The grace of its outward display had an esoteric significance, compelling those unable to read to venture more deeply into the inner world of the language, where meanings are unveiled through dedication, which might often take the form of worship.

The impressive scope of the Koç collection's treasury of calligraphy, especially its historical archive, is exhibited in part at the breezy, quiet Sadberk Hanım Museum. The air above the remote institution has a special calm surrounded by the forests of the Black Sea. *Harmony of Line and Color* begins at the ground floor hall and is also interspersed throughout the multistory summer refuge of Turkey's famous family of cultural philanthropists. Their commitment to embracing their nation's colorful past and present is nonpareil.

One of the earliest works at the show is comprised of two parchment pages of the Quran in the primitive Kufic script, dated to an approximation of the eighth to the ninth century. The aesthetic focus is already evident, although its impression could be best understood as merely explicit in

terms of conveying what is said, or heard. The verses are from the *Surah an-Nisa*, or translated from the Arabic as “The Women,” the fourth chapter of the Quran.

The loud ostentation of high culture in the early nineteenth century had its incarnations in the Muslim milieu with Ottoman illuminated manuscripts. There are stunning examples at *Harmony of Line and Color*, such as a piece from 1811-1812, following the more familiar naskh script – a type common to the modern Quran. The lush floral arrangements and complexity of geometric framings are characteristic of not only the Islamic civilization but to an embryonic cultural globalization.

The tastes of Western Europe had never been more influential in late Ottoman society. In which case, calligraphers working in the nineteenth century with names like Çemşir Hafız and Seyyid Hüseyin, placed the actual verses of the Quran into slight windows of legibility, overwhelmed by the golden, reflective gleam of paginated ornamentation. There is an illuminated Quran from 1848-1849 by calligrapher Es-Seyyid Abdullah ez-Zühdi et-Temimi so ornate its flowers crowd the script.

While rarer, certain illuminated Qurans feature figurative full-spectrum drawings of pilgrimage destinations, like Mecca. The *naskh* calligrapher Hafız Osman Kayışzade pictured the Kaaba surrounded by mountainous desert, above the green rolling hills around the iconic Al-Masjid an-Nabawī built by Prophet Mohammed. From the distance of time, it appears that the manuscripts from the Quran, like that calligraphed by Hüseyin en-Nazif, are dated to an era that cultivated its embellishments, spiraling pink circles of slender petals around scripture.

Toward the contemporary, by the turn of the twentieth century, there were more unique varieties of figurative calligraphy that do not simply elaborate the space around what is written, but that use each stroke of the letter to create pictures. A late Ottoman under-glass painting adapts the linearity of the Arabic language into the depiction of a large sea vessel, with upward marks forming the sail masts of the ship. Other sayings fill the billowing white canvases.

In 1879, the Ottoman calligrapher El-hâc Mehmed Emin el-Bergamavi refashioned writings by the ascetic theologian Abdülkâdir Geylânî into a sailboat, yet with abstraction in relation to his spare range of gold, black and white. The seafaring voyage was a strong metaphor for inner, moral development in a time when the greatest lengths of travel were conducted over water.

The practitioner of Islamic calligraphy at the cusp of modernity found spiritual refuge by communing with nature. *Harmony of Line and Color* features a series of compositions on leaves, where botanical specimens were painted over, many in gold ink. The visual effect, transparent and delicate, made for a subtle, elegant articulation of faith in human life as intimately bound with its environment, and all of creation.

December 15, 10:32 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Madness

In his last speech, given not even two weeks before his passing in January of 1986, the artist Joseph Beuys said that everything is sculpture. Beuys, regarded by many as one of the most important creatives of postwar Europe, also asserted that everyone has artistic potential, and in his politics, conceived programs of social progress in which the act of original invention had universal agency.

While the 2013 biography of Beuys by Swiss writer Hans-Peter Riegel stirred controversy – namely that the German artist had unapologetic Nazi ties and supported a problematic race theory by Rudolf Steiner – the murky waters of denazification have not entirely overwhelmed the myth of his legend. He was a storyteller, and his art a function of the literal definition of fabrication.

Beuys swore by an experience he had while flying for the Luftwaffe. As he would spin the tale, in 1943, a Russian anti-aircraft shot down his plane. He came to in the wilds of Crimea, where a band of Tatar nomads wrapped him in felt and fat to protect him from the cold. That felt became a staple medium for his artwork and is part of the narrative facade that Beuys wove to craft his public persona as a figment of perception, as a critique of objective experience.

Two of his conceptual pieces, bookending the last decade of his life's work, from 1974 to 1985, are part of the show *Regular Insanity*, curated by Marcus Graf at Akbank Sanat. Beuys is a noteworthy name in a city and region where the direct experience of art made by a class of characters often termed old masters connotes travel abroad, to European capitals, America and the West.

*Felt Postcard* (1985) represents one of the last of over a hundred postcards that Beuys crafted with an eye for holding an object up to the light of pragmatism and abstraction simultaneously. Impossible to send as a postcard, made with unsuitable materials, the piece relays the distance that conceptualist thought has strayed from everyday communication, and from the workings of the social order.

The postcards that Beuys had designed since the 1960s until his untimely death at age sixty-four came out of his Heidelberg-based publisher Klaus Staack. They are aptly curated by Graf at Akbank Sanat, modestly on its second-floor, surrounded by various multimedia works by Turkish artists young and old, among representatives of other nations both east and west of Istanbul. "Today, after all, absolute knowledge has vanished, truth is only valid in temporary cultural groups and social agreements," Graf wrote.

One curious modernistic sculptural work by the German artist Anna Fasshauer exemplifies her signature experiments in metallic pliability. Tubular forms shoot oblique and upward off the ground in a tangled assemblage of twists and turns. When it comes to art's objective

commodification, Fasshauer stands firm in a century's momentum against the tides that would confine and pigeonhole the humanism of creative work.

The independent curator and art writer Marc Leblanc used the words, "inexhaustible" and "baffling" for the art of Fasshauer, whose work appears at *Regular Insanity* in the form of her piece, *Straw Le Willi* (2018). In that sense, the artist distills an object into a metaphor for the entire universe, and also the phenomenon of individuality in relation to the whole, by creating a single piece of material that is void of use, excepting its purely subjective value.

Graf backdropped Fasshauer's piece with a wall drawing by Frankfurt-based artist duo Özlem Günyol and Mustafa Kunt. *Ceaseless Doodle* (2009) erupts into focus like the cosmic microwave radio background picturing a likeness of the universe as a dust particle emerging into being for the temporary, inexplicable spell of all existence. In conceptualist style, Günyol and Kunt assert a neo-minimalist approach to ideological representation.

In the adjacent hall, Kerem Ozan Bayraktar plays with popular scientism, particularly its obsession with extraterrestrial habitation. *Some of the Potentially Uninhabitable Planets* (2018) reverses the mainstream narrative, picturing three exoplanets in a harsh, technically confounding light to emphasize their hostility to human colonization.

*Ceaseless Doodle*, as the exhibition notes read, "includes all of the national borderlines in the world." The duo consolidated geopolitical definition into an abstract web of curvilinear expression, accentuating and elaborating on the arbitrary aesthetics of politicized cartography as an irrational element of modernism.

In step with his clever curation, Graf projected the film, *The Way Things Go* (1987) by artist duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss between the two floors in which *Regular Insanity* sprawls throughout the private art institution on Istiklal Avenue. Mesmerizing in its watchability, the thirty-minute adaptation of plastic ideas spans Duchamp's readymades and Dadaist disorder, following a sequence of household utilities and industrial equipment along a kinetic joyride of vehicular objects passing through liquid and fire.

Comparable in its departure from reason is another film, the recently commissioned *New Acid* (2019), by Basim Magdy, who trained his Super 16mm lens on the anthropomorphic qualities of animals, shown in various states in the wild, yet with text captions that satirize the escapism from reality that social media and talk apps provide between otherwise obscure digital actors. "Perhaps karma has a short-term memory," asks a meerkat, to which another replies, "Karma is an elephant. It only remembers enemies."

The unreasonable volatility of the text to depersonalize and denigrate is the subject of a thoughtful piece by Yeşim Uzunöz, titled, *Message Requests* (2018), or, *Being a Woman in Social Media*, documenting three stages of online temperament, itemized by a color-coded installation of books. Between reckless apology, intimate emotionality and toxic profanity,

Uzonöz critiques the normalization of computerized human relations like a data journalist. Dated to the hour, one late night entry in her red book begins, in Turkish: "Ah my beauty, my flower, my honey."

The veteran Turkish artist, Komet, gains a fresh lease on life at *Regular Sanity*, where Graf renewed the personality of his incomparable, iconoclastic legacy by showing his video, *The Artist at Work* (2009). It is a sped-up caricature of a neurotic painter lavishing a brush dipped white onto a white canvas. Nothing appears, but the artist, a wiry-haired silver fox in workman's overalls, passionately, however sardonically, illustrates the purely subjective solipsism of the creative process as an art in itself.

December 22, 5:08 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Poetry

In the bunker, there are lights, and the people are reading poems. They are masked in darkness and think of freedom. Thirteen bulbs hang in the windless cellar. No drafts blow through the airtight confines, but newcomers with fresh eyes descend to the floor and gaze directly, unafraid, into the blinding chain of illuminations.

Words in Cyrillic script and arcane symbols are painted on the round frosted glass. Each stroke is a call to remember the communist dream that was once held by Vladimir Mayakovsky, one of history's most politically complex and disturbed of literary polymaths.

Mayakovsky, infamously hailed by Stalin as the poet laureate of Soviet Russia, has retained a posthumous legacy of artistic integrity among the new internationalist intelligentsia due to the irresistibly quixotic brilliance of his verse, of the vision he instilled for the world's soul despite the trappings of the particular social milieu that ultimately led to his personal downfall by suicide at age thirty-six. The note he left after shooting himself through the heart read: "I'm through with life / and (we) should absolve / from mutual hurts, afflictions and spleen."

One poem by Mayakovsky, dated 1917, is translated into English and presented on stiff, glossy cardboard paper at Riverrun, an offbeat cultural outpost in Istanbul's traditional downtown close to the piers of Karaköy. It's a refuge for the high-minded few whose taste for art is only sated when paired with a healthy dose of literature and where the classic and obscure meet over unprecedented multicultural crossings and collaborative curations. 1917 is, of course, the first year of the Russian Revolution.

"Too slow, the wagon of years, / The oxen of days-too glum, / Our god is the god of speed, / Our heart-our battle-drum," Mayakovsky wrote, under the swing of empowerment by the hands of the people he met on the street or at work, believing in liberation from autocracy. "Songs are our weapons," he sang, ending the invocation to resistance with a musical affirmation of humanity, "Our breasts be the brass of cymbals!" His was the presence of a single man among the masses out to reclaim the universal right to reason and earth.

When the young idealist turned thirty, in 1923, his peerless versification of language became fertile ground for visual artists keen to adapt his verbal energy for the purposes of modern ideas that could sway the countless many with the flash of an image. El Lissitzky was, for Mayakovsky, a vessel by which his message entered not only the minds of millions of worker revolutionaries in Russia but to the liberal movements of Western Europe via Moscow. Originally an illustrator of children's books in Yiddish, Lissitzky came to lead the avant-garde.

The writer Cem İleri determined that Lissitzky's cover for Mayakovsky's object-book *For the Voice* (1923) was a "masterpiece of graphic design." In the style of concrete poetry and steeping his approach in every novel concept that swept early modern Europe, from futurists to

constructivists, Bauhaus and De Stijl, Lissitzky was integral to Mayakovsky's rise as both a popular leader of revolutionary fervor and a cult figure of creative invention.

If Lissitzky married Mayakovsky's poetics of voice with visual design, Sarkis graduated his efforts into a poetry of objects. It is clear in the remount of his installation, *Mayakovsky-Lissitzky: The Source Illuminates* (1978) at the bunker in Riverrun, also the title of the exhibition.

From the exilic silencing of Mona Hatoum to the critical projections of Ayşe Erkmen and textile spectrums of Bernard Frize, the three small gallery spaces at Riverrun have been home to a wealth of world-class curations since its opening in 2017, essentially making art history in Turkey's uneven landscape for contemporary culture. African-American artist David Hammons makes his welcome Turkish debut at Riverrun with *Phat Free* (1995/1999), a five-minute video riffing on urban poverty and free jazz.

The exhibition space Ariel, since transplanted from the uppish airs of liberal Nişantaşı to a dark, underground enclosure in the mixed environs of Tophane, is a fitting environment in which to convey the racial dualism that Hammons conveys with the clarity of night's distinction from the day. "I think that art now is putting people to sleep," Hammons said for an interview in 2011 with American art historian Kellie Jones.

In 2004, Hammons was the subject of an essay by African-American artist Glenn Ligon, whose work for the 16th Istanbul Biennial appeared on Büyükada Island in the fall. That Ligon published a study of Hammons, who, born in 1943, is seventeen years his senior, exemplifies a tradition of African-American contemporary art. Istanbul has a historic role in the global struggle for civil rights, having been a peculiar part of cultivating physical and intellectual perspective from the pervasive, stifling racial oppressions of the U.S.

Ligon resurrected the iconic enigma of James Baldwin by translating the voiceover of the film *From Another Place* (1973) by Sedat Pakay. In like form aesthetically, although conceptually contrasting in its American immersion, *Phat Free* embraces a grainy and dim outlook, like the cloud of ignorance under which African consciousness emerged on the streets of America. Hammons kicks a metal bucket as cars and passersby drift past a cold cityscape. He is dressed in a loose-fitting, unbecoming getup resembling the tattered clothes of a homeless man.

The wall is blackened by a colorless light. An erratic, cacophonous sound issues from the ceiling. To Hammons, it is a metaphor for a dialect of English spoken by poor, inner-city African-American communities, the word, "phat" being one of them, referring to music that has a thick, funky texture. "I like being from nowhere; it's a beautiful place," said Hammons, as quoted in Ligon's 2004 essay for *Artforum*, "Black Light: David Hammons and the Poetics of Emptiness."

Environmental nihilism is a bracing source of creative potential for artists like Hammons, and also Nermin Er, whose piece, *Study Lines* made with forty-eight strips of paper, accents gaps of broken architectural lines with a minimalist touch. It is a gentle introduction to the trio of shows

at Riverrun, curated at the bookstore entrance floor on a table under glass, and accompanied by the stop-motion succession of its production.

Between the white gaps of Er and the radiant pretense of Sarkis, the rough magic of Hammons mines the collective subconscious of a community bound to the veils of ignorance that undermine their humanity. His performative, nocturnal videography charts a path on which misbegotten and disenfranchised Americans endure the protracted hemorrhaging of their nation's greatest moral reckoning.

Downcast yet playful with the scraps of industrial urbanism, Hammons set his sights on the figurative obstacle in his path and amplifies it into a pastiche of music and art that, while dissonant and obscure, expresses the bitter truth of lived experience.

December 29, 5:20 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



**2020**

## Project

There are faces that flicker in the celluloid light, each a testament of the past and its imagining by the hands of artists. Their names are unrevealed. A word cloud hangs over a breezy room, all the more ambient for the sound of three projectors whirring in the silent, lofty museum space. A group ambles past, followed by a lone seeker who stands behind a screen, eyeing for a fresh perspective. And that is what filmmaker Rosa Barba delivers, casting a hard light on the world of art behind closed doors.

By appearances, Barba trains her lens on works from the ancient times to the modern, or what *The New Yorker's* senior art critic Peter Schjeldahl would call entirely contemporary, noting that all created art is concurrent, and temporary, along with its appreciations, definitions and time simply because it exists now. She makes a point to trace her camera sidelong, oblique and edgewise, framing the contours of the shelves, utilities and architecture of the facilities in which the art is stored as much as to show the works themselves.

*Poured Painting: Blue, Black, Blue* (1999) is somewhere in the middle of *The Hidden Conference*, the curatorial title of the film trio, also placed above the word cloud in which the names of artworks are connected to each other, seemingly haphazardly. *The Orientalist* (1976/77) points to *Landscape with Forest* (1925), which then returns to *Poured Painting*. Barba could be said to be an archivist, beginning with her work as a curator for the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid for her 2010 show, *A Curated Conference*.

Stylized in the vein of an homage to the silent film era, a black-and-white text appears onscreen for her piece, *The Hidden Conference: About the Discontinuous History of Things We See and Don't See* (2010). It reads: "As he moves easily between various groups, he recognizes both relationships and negation between participants." With a mystic aura, her film has a fantasy element, in which the artworks are shown to have private lives, assuming an invisible existence, personality and experience unto themselves.

Barba, as an artist of film, curates like a director. She places human figures in scenes that, while lacking action, are potent with drama. A pair of robed Greco-Roman men converse whisperingly, obscured by a rectangular object, just enough to allow them the distance to mumble on about what matters might concern them for the rest of eternity. A gleaming light bounces off the busts of men, statues of bulls and figurines of prehistoric models. "Between times and possibilities, a state of readiness for departure," reads a text midway into *About the Discontinuous History of Things We See and Don't See*. The words set up a transition from her focus on the sculpture to that of the painting. While also focalizing on other anthropomorphic pieces in wood and stone, she begins to explore a more two-dimensional world, in which paintings are hung, and slid on layers of caging.

It is an austere, unglamorous life for art when not displayed in public, or sold to a fawning collector. Barba does credit the works, by title and date, in *About the Discontinuous History of*

*Things We See and Don't See*. The works span the better part of the twentieth century, from *Portrait André Gide* (1928) to *Sea-piece* (1970). For her lengthiest, fourteen-minute work at *Hidden Conference*, subtitled *About the Shelf and Mantel* (2015), she dives deeper into obscurity.

A stripe of tether wrapped around stored paintings adds a touch of contemporaneity to otherwise antiquated fashions of human portrayal and scenographic coloration. And a sculpture, bagged and boxed, takes on the guise not only of its internalized form but of its non-curated context, lending insight into the fundamental requirements of what could be called intellectual decoration, if not curation, for lack of higher-brow sentiment. Yet, Barba discovers the coincidences of filmic opportunity, when, for example, overlapping paintings in reflection.

There is a school of thought which says a thing or process can only be understood or named by identifying its opposite, so as to situate its distinction with proper perspective, enough to grant unique definition. By fixing her camera on certain canvases in *About the Shelf and Mantel*, one of which is by the early modern Turkish painter, Fahrelnissa Zeid, the light in the room changes and bounces off of the metallic industrial equipment in the cold backrooms.

With repetitive cycles of frames that slowly move and transparently overlay beautifully painted pictures with monotonous industrial geometries, Barba's film enchants into a seamless experience of art and its opposite as also aesthetically codependent. These works, without their placards of description, admiring crowds and high-ceilinged environs, are to a great extent denuded of the prestige won by the traditions of their popular celebration.

At a point in the film, *About the Shelf and Mantel* (2015), a work of oils is suffused with a reflection of the decidedly uncultured setting on which it depends for longevity, or as an artist might aspire toward, immortality. Just how much the artist ego needs all of which might be termed and categorized as not-art escapes not only artists but also public romantics, amateurs, even the historical aficionados and fair socialites among them.

In the shortest film, *A Fractured Play* (2012), clocking in at five minutes, the artworks themselves come to resemble the fragmented interior of disassembly, of apparent chaos prior to the anticipation and curation of a show on the open floor. But by filming these objects on their own, as it were, broken in more ways than one, from their original, ancient installations, and also from a proper angle for viewing, Barba humanizes these pieces of stone.

The deified men and women of antiquity, worker spirits and robed belles take on an air of natural life, unmediated by the fleeting subterfuge of overeducated, postmodern society. It is an advantage of film to peer into the depths of collective consciousness and to spy assemblages of things otherwise prepared for the pretenses of live encounters. Barba is an acute observer of the art world as part of a holistic relationship with all of human industry.

January 5, 4:12 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Rest

In 1919, Sigmund Freud published the essay, *The Uncanny* as an exploration of aesthetics, which he admitted from the start was not exactly his field as a psychoanalyst. Nonetheless, he ventured forth into matters of literal definition. The word "arouses dread and creeping horror," he determined, although distinguishing it from the "fearful" by pointing out its underlying ambiguity as a concept that runs counter to the sublime, but which affects the same mental region.

Hale Tenger, a budding master of the environmental installation, invites people into a window of footsore curiosities at Mısır Apartment on İstiklal Avenue, wherein the cube of Galeri Nev Istanbul is fit with a series of videos and sculptures whose mediums merge, and project overlapping volumes of light; the color of fields, waters and skies. Her muse is a poem by Edip Cansever, an antiques dealer and naturalist of the Second New literary wave.

By the time Freud confessed his ignorance on the topic of aesthetics, he had already authored at least twelve books and was poised to crystallize his theory on the death drive as a psychological principle equal in importance to that of the impetus to life, what he equated with the workings of the libido, a modus of thinking for which he is best known. The instinct to disintegrate, Freud conjectured, could also be understood as the Nirvana principle.

To certain interpretations of Buddhist philosophy, karma is symbolized as a gust of wind and is often synonymous with action. A person's karma is simply what they do. But reaching perfection, in that tradition of metaphors, or in that mythology, is conceived as a windless state where even atop the summit of a great peak, the air is still. Cansever, writing between deals at the Grand Bazaar, came to a similar conclusion in his poetics.

"There is a place where the winds rest / The resting winds, take a break," wrote Cansever in the middle of his poem, *Where the Winds Rest*, which inspired Tenger to serenade a blank art space with crosshatches of shadow under an aquamarine luminescence emit from an oval-shaped video projection, likened to the round lookout holes across the hull of ships for those in steerage to see phosphorescent shocks of biology in the blue depths.

*Cherries, waters, mirrors* (2019) sets a surreal tone, with its pastiche of plastic media, including bronze, copper, marble and glass. In its own corner, a gleaming green moving image shows an underwater scene in which an inanimate object, or dead creature, lies on a bed of water vegetables. The otherworldly approximates to reality, as lived experience in nature, which Tenger artfully captures in the frame of her exhibition.

The sound of propelling fans is a device significantly employed by Sarkis to create an atmosphere at his historic installation, Çaylak Sokak at Arter's *What Time Is It?* group show, which Tenger also used when she first approached Cansever's poem in 2007. The lines, "Didn't we pull the body out from underwater / We didn't pull the body out from underwater" appear

toward the end of *Where the Winds Rest*. Over the course of twelve years, Tenger did not waver from replicating the poem's title in her artworks, nor from investigating their inner meanings.

The lines, which repeat themselves to dramatic effect, vary with slight changes to the verbal conjugation, sharpening Freud's focus on his psychological etymology of the uncanny. The old intellectual lion found it necessary to conjure up an uncanny sensation in himself before writing about it in an authoritative sense. *Where the Winds Rest* is an experiment in conjuring such a feeling, a powerful one that is striking for its brand of familiarity that is not wholly desired, but that, in the language of Freud, creeps up on one.

In the marble sink affixed to a wall at Galeri Nev Istanbul for *Where the Winds Rest*, the bronze cherries therein enchant for their static presence alone, summoning the powers of the imagination. The interior is suffused with subtle darkness enough to accent such touches as lucid videos of gleaming waves cutout into a hanging mirror. Beside it, the surface of a circular monitor ripples like a calm puddle into which a deer gazes, at peace in its forest home. The piece is rather poetically titled *Magic is the mirror of a deer* (2019).

The deer is a powerful symbol in Turkish literature and the nation's cultural history, utilized by the late Ottoman poet Ziya Gökalp to express modern pan-Turkic nationalism, or when the folkloric landscapes of Central Asia link with Anatolia through fantasies of its fauna. The thirteenth-century mystic humanist Haji Bektash Veli, a contemporary of Rumi, appears to followers as a deer. Many believe it to the extent that they refuse to hunt deer out of precaution. Furthermore, it is the Hittite motif of a long-antlered deer encircled by a ring of bronze that was taken up by Turkey's capital of Ankara.

But the strength of the show and its most affecting elements are a pair of vinyl screens that waft gently as its centerpiece. Airy and transcendent, the tranquil mood that Tenger has created has a semblance with her work for the 16th Istanbul Biennial, one of the strongest installations of the city's flagship art event. Her voice could be heard whispering a nature poem as pools of water were reflected against obsidian discs and the horizon from the isle of Büyükkada.

Tenger evokes the pacifying Nirvana principle inherent not only in human psychology but throughout creation. That the world has the tendency to be at peace, to dissolve itself of ego and predominance holds a current of being that is as obscure to the eye as it is palpable to the heart. In similar regard, essayist Boleslaw Miciński sought to render visuality in words with his piece, *Portrait of Kant*, which in 1994, Tenger also adapted into an art piece.

"The division of the arts into 'spatial' and 'temporal' belongs to one of the most interesting chapters in the history of aesthetics," wrote Miciński in 1979 for *The Polish Review*, echoing concerns raised over half a century earlier by Freud. Miciński essentially examines the fuzzy mental boundary where sensations received via artificial media coalesce into a similitude of full-body immersion, recreating the uncanny feeling that arises when what is seen is felt as remembered, without recalling having had the actual experience.

With acute temporal awareness, Tenger self-references her works, their conceptual and physical features, amply deviating from past efforts so as to remain innovative. The black reflective pool curated against the longest wall at Galeri Nev Istanbul is grown with metallic shoots of herbs, in which lines of Cansever's poem surge patiently up through the shallow liquid vessel reminiscent of her piece at the biennial.

And cycling up her 2007 installation after *Where the Winds Rest*, she signs off with a question mark, an uncanny open ending to a macabre scene, "Didn't we pull the body out from underwater / We didn't pull the body out from underwater." The poem and its art emerge from underwater, as a body left to drift before sinking down again into its origins of obscurity.

January 12, 7:17 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Waiting

In conversation with İnci Furni, curator Eda Berkmen observed how the artist's drawings were more like site-specific performances, reflecting a union of her body, memories and the materials she uses, often paper or canvas. Furni, an artist of special nuance and character, specializes in enchanting portrayal of stance, balance and pause.

Furni believes in the spiritualistic experience of body projection, also known as astral travel. But so as not to become too esoteric, she adds what she terms "frivolities" that distract the eye from becoming too engrossed in speculation, an experience common to art exploration. *She Waited for a While* (2019), the title of the exhibition, was an installation of drawings and hula hoops.

Before entering the subterranean gallery at Arter in the industrial Dolapdere neighborhood in Istanbul's Beyoğlu District, a nineteen-plus-minute video by the artist, titled *Lorem Ipsum* (2019), has been mounted, which shows the psychological poise that Furni maintained. The artist has occupied the curatorial space where her show would land some two and a half months prior to its opening.

The measure of the temporal phrasing, "a while," is ambiguous. Furni tests its definition against the automatic sliding door that leads into her exhibition's gallery at Arter. In loose, casual black clothes, she stands in the way of the door, choreographing her body as an obstruction to its mechanical spontaneity. Facing its slide straightaway, with one foot in front of the other, or with her shoulder, she tries to stop it from closing.

*Lorem Ipsum* is a play on the blank slate visual used by publishers and designers. Its reference in the context of *She Waited for a While* is not clear though neither is the entire frame of inclusivity in which an art exhibition exists, no less hers in particular. By a creative interpretation, *Lorem Ipsum* speaks to the artist's hesitance to follow through under the spotlight of a prestigious show.

*She Waited for a While* is one of four inaugural solo exhibitions with openings that coincided with the public unveiling of the new Arter building in Dolapdere in September, 2019. The exhibition also featured Turkish artists Ayşe Erkmen and Altan Gürman and Italian filmmaker Rosa Barba. Furni, along with Barba, is of a younger generation, born in the 1970s. Her process, a combination of multidisciplinary approaches, appears as naively charming as her videoed auto-portraiture.

"I am not a performance artist, but *Lorem Ipsum* makes me think about being there, the time I had spent putting together the exhibition, the way I heard the sound of the doors opening each time before I saw someone come in, and it also leads me to recognize that all of this was building up to the moment of the exhibition we would keep there for the next four months," Furni told Berkmen, who then commented on the use of the door in her exhibition.

The more time that Furni spent interacting with the door, the more she noticed it taking on human characteristics. It became cautious, she said. Her awareness and confrontation with the limitations and freedoms of white cube curation runs parallel to a degree with Erkmen's show upstairs, a retrospective approach to her work from as early as 1969 to the present. Her piece, *9'04"* (1999/2019) assumed the form of a museum wall, and moved.

On the floor of *She Waited for a While*, the drawings of Furni are upright on plywood, as to enact a scene in which people stand, walk and pass a collection of objects, platforms, chairs and more hula hoops. There is an intriguing assortment of individuals. A young man holds a travel briefcase, his coat flecked and dotted with monochromatic streaks of abstraction. He is stone-faced but ready, leaning forward, unafraid.

Hues of black reappear in Furni's more surrealistic sketches. In one, a figure in a short red dress hovers above the contents of a child's imagination, in which a pony, duck and truck fly upward from the dirty, green ground. A motherly figure then represents Furni's bent towards realism. She sports a fanny pack, eyeglasses and a jacket over a dress, with pants underneath and holds a cup. Her facial expression is that of a young woman aging.

The ability to sustain opposition is the cornerstone of both drama and democracy. With a subtle sleight of hand, Furni's drawings dream figments of time as it shows having passed over the faces of her portraits. A girl in a winter coat looks back concernedly. A boy in a puffy jacket trains his focus down and away, as if he is shy of being immortalized. He is the depiction of life, after all, and embraces its disappearing act as truth.

Almost hidden in the bottom, left corner of the horizontal, single-story show, is a short video titled, *Landscape* (2019). In it, the fingers of Furni come into focus to point out and transcendently pinch her focus within a green, bucolic forest. At one point, she touches upward, along the trunk of a tree, recalling her physical proximity with the sliding entrance door in *Lorem Ipsum*, only with metaphysical distance. The act is echoed in her drawing philosophy.

And front and center, Berkmen curated Furni's twelve-plus-minute video titled, *I Found This on the Way*, projecting it so as to allow its cold, subdued light to pour over the gallery-wide installation. The work is performative, as she sits over a table, and first sets two puzzle pieces of wood together, which are identical to the mounting stands used for her drawings, only more life-sized. The artist scratches her head and begins naming what seems like random objects.

Onto a circular platform, she places a golden duck and beside it a pine cone and red plastic ball. More platforms follow, and varying colored objects, perishable and artificial. By the way she talks, it's apparent that she is serious, curating the contents of her own mind as a reflection of her surroundings, fragmented into obsolete details, surprising externalities and failed attempts to make sense out of things, while trying to build things out of other things.



*I Found This on the Way* explores objective vocabularies. It's a survey of nouns and their lexical isolation in a context without a meaning, or in which there is no meaning other than that assigned by the artist. Furni, in such light, adopts the central tenets of relational aesthetics, a term coined by 16th Istanbul Biennial curator Nicholas Bourriaud to affirm the holistic involvement of art with its social environment. Furni does so in her wordplay.

In the exhibition book for *She Waited for a While*, published by Arter and edited by Eda Berkmen and Süreyya Evren, there is significant literary experimentation. *I Found This on the Way* is printed as a kind of concrete poem, the visuals of its word order on the page as important as the semantic association. "I found this on the way / In the evening I'll take it to the bridge and throw it off / Maybe we'll burn it" begins the versification of her visual exploits.

January 19, 9:33 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Missing

Since October of 2019, and the re-unveiling of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), many commentators have decried the often arbitrary use of terminology to designate the revisionary overhaul. *The Art Newspaper* called it a “radical rehang” inside what has become a “wealthy, corporate behemoth,” where the pragmatic origins of white cube curation established American modernism for the art world out of an entirely minimalist interior.

“We will have a diverse cosmopolitan culture or none worth bothering about,” celebrated the dying senior critic Peter Schjehldahl of *The New Yorker*. Around the world, curators and directors of art institutions have wondered just why it has taken the American and international cultural sector until now to diversify its social profile in step with the progressive rewriting of art history that ensued in the wake of late twentieth-century civil rights movements.

A month after the reopening, author Jillian Steinhauer of *The Art Newspaper* wrote, “And yet, once your eyes adjust to this new, welcome vision, you may start to see more clearly what’s missing – because a lot still is.” She went on to point out how not a single work by a Native American artist was on display. This comes after White Mountain Apache musician Laura Ortman made waves at the 2019 Whitney Biennial.

The permanent collections at the MoMA are divided across three floors. The most recent encompasses the years from the 1970s to the present and comprises sixteen galleries, each of which has a thematic focus. As the introductory wall text reads, “A gallery may be devoted to an artist, a specific medium or discipline, a particular place in a moment in time, or a shared creative idea.” Some galleries are more specific than others.

“Before and After Tiananmen” pivots modern Chinese art, as opposed to the vaguer “Inner and Outer Space.” The latter is presented as an exploration of the environmental politics of borderlines. The idea is to unpack the relationship between sprawling urbanization and technological advances. Enter Ethiopia-born American artist Julie Mehretu, whose acrylic and ink painting on canvas, *Empirical Construction, Istanbul* (2003), was then displayed.

The work, Mehretu's sole piece on view at the MoMA for the reopening, is characteristic of her multivalent oeuvre, a fragmentary implosion of cutup forms and varicolored media, geometrically complex in its curvilinear overlapping of flags and flames, rays and panels. For all of its abstraction, it is the only reference point – never mind contribution to contemporary art in the U.S. – that the so-called new MoMA has for those with a taste for Turkish influence.

Peculiarly massive and often plastered as murals on the walls of vast institutions to reflect the dynamic scale of cityscapes, Mehretu’s anti-paintings have the look of materials collected from the scraps of a paper workshop, with its notational lines lacking meaning but aesthetically rich for their capacity to pose an interpretive perspective. “From a distance, you have one experience and a different experience from up close,” said Mehretu in an *Art21* interview.

“Having spent time in Istanbul, Germany, Australia and then back in the States, I was really interested in how our whole experience of viewing the world and the war was mediated through the television and newspapers,” Mehretu told Lawrence Chua in a 2005 conversation for the New York magazine, *BOMB*, which has a bent to profile artists of the African diaspora. “It felt almost like following a match or a sporting event.”

In its digitized permanent collections alone, the MoMA lists 83,235 works by 26,412 artists online, twenty of whom are Turkish. Not one piece of theirs is on view. Many are young artists, born in 1970 or after, but their works span the breadth of modernism. In 1962, painter Bedri Rahmi prepared a work titled *The Chain* of synthetic polymer paint on burlap, effecting a textural combination that aligned with concurrent veins of abstract expressionism.

*The Chain* first appeared at MoMA at its Recent Acquisitions show in the winter of 1962-1963. Rahmi would pave the way for a lesser-known formerly New York-based artist from Istanbul named Tosun Bayrak, who painted and performed to abandon during the shock wave trend of the 1970s. Soon after Rahmi's American debut, lithography by Burhan Doğançay came to the fore.

Two untitled pieces by Doğançay from 1969 are in the MoMA collection. They resemble the sliced paper works of Matisse, only with Warhol-style pop color varieties. Doğançay was a luminous name in the early small gallery world of Istanbul at Pg Art Gallery, before the city earned its rightful place on the global art map, arguably due to its biennial. Another painter who exhibited at the *Recent Acquisitions* winter show in 1962-1963 was Erol Akyavaş.

His canvas, *The Glory of the Kings*, is questionably dated to 1959. Its lines have a calligraphic tendency, mixed with smatterings of Salvador Dali surrealism, ultimately presaging the figurative abstraction that Keith Haring would later perfect. But the color field of his background is as startling as the maze of linguistic shapes that he calculates with an eye for the cultural patterns of the Eastern Mediterranean.

An earlier show of Recent Acquisitions, which took place in the spring of 1959, featured the sculpture of Zühtü Müritoğlu and İlhan Koman, but the MoMA has yet to photograph their work, leaving it invisible even for remote researchers. Despite what many are sure will remain painfully overlooked, the age demographic of younger Turkish artists whose works are archived by MoMA's exhaustive collections is redemptive.

Aslı Çavuşoğlu, born in 1982, is the youngest Turkish artist in the MoMA's collections. Utilizing diverse materials to reflect Anatolian pluralism, she created her diptych *Red / Red (Untitled)* in 2015 with Armenian cochineal ink and Turkish red on two sheets of painted paper. Held in the Department of Prints and Drawings, the crimson of her pieces emerge from their medium like a woven textile.

Faded from the bottom after a series of bold right angles, they could very well be seen as historical interpretations of the Turkish inspirations of American painter Frank Stella, whose trips to the Neolithic towns of Çatal Höyük and other noteworthy sites led him to create such works as *Turkish Mambo* (1967). His canvas *Gray Scrambled Double Square* (1964) introduces the floor of the MoMA's permanent collections, stretching back to the 1940s.

The retro traditionalism of Çavuşoğlu is akin to another Turkish artist in an A-list collection in New York, namely that of Gülay Semercioğlu at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her two-dimensional metal sculptures frame the techniques of Turkish carpet weaving with a contemporary twist. In terms of popular visibility, Americans and internationalists may recognize cineastes Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Ferzan Özpetek, whose 35mm films are at the MoMA.

January 22, 10:18 PM  
New York City, USA

## Constructive

Like many Turkish modernists, the creative trajectory of Altan Gürman's career as an artist begins in the City of Lights – old, gay Paris. The 1960s were a stormy time in the world due to the runaway success of liberalism. But while conservatives assuaged their headaches, intellectuals and visionaries saw their muses dancing in time to the pulse of social change.

Decidedly constructivist in style, steeped in the cut-and-dry definitions of illustration and screen-printing, Gürman devised new techniques to juxtapose natural forms with those conceived by the artifice of men. The earliest of his works, as curated by Başak Doğa Temür for Arter, is from 1965, his penultimate year at the School of Fine Arts in Paris.

His series "Statistics" has the inventive vitality of pop and op art mixed together toward a reevaluation of still life. Centered by a mesmerizing acrylic on canvas depicting a potato, Gürman drew from his studies of botanical and agricultural publications. Playing with a visual vocabulary that to contemporary eyes appears outmoded, he refreshed modern art's identity.

*Sugar Beet* (1965) explores similar contours, also integrating the medium of plastic, which made for a two-dimensional sculpture of an acrylic painting. The chopped physicality of the work commingles with its repetitive lines of color, which ultimately augments the effect of the subject itself with regards to the mundane, objective perception of what looks like a vegetable.

That same year proved utterly productive for Gürman, who, at the ripe age of thirty, reflected on his earlier education as a graduate of the Department of Painting at the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts in 1960, and sought to diversify his multidisciplinary approach to framed material. The polymers of *Appearance* (1965) shimmer over a green horizon of hills.

In 1976, Gürman died, having just entered his forties, but not before creating a distinctive oeuvre that will challenge and redirect the course of art history for as long as it is written. In his final year, he was just establishing himself with his first and only solo exhibition at the Turkish-German Cultural Center.

A pair of linocuts on paper, both untitled, from his "Composition" series in his last year, open the Gürman retrospective at Arter. They evoke the outline of the potato that absorbed his attention in earlier work, only emptied of color in more of a cloud-like depiction. His use of color makes for a diptych of matte browns in contrast with lighter variations.

The red and white stripes aligned diagonally across one of his *Composition* pieces is a common motif also featuring prolifically in his "Montage" series, also from 1967. The latter works run parallel to those of an American contemporary, Robert Rauschenberg, who merged painting and sculpture to avant-garde, modernistic abandon.

Arguably the most iconic work of Gürman is *Montage 6* (1967), a symmetrical composition that burns into the mind's eye like an evergreen perennial. Made with cellulose paint on wood, the square backdrop of a cloudy sky is set in contradistinction with a striped red-and-white frame.

The octagonal structure is likely a subliminal reference to the artist's underlying dialogue with neoclassicism, the eight-pointed shape being an Ottoman symbol. In her essay for Arter's exhibition catalog on Gürman, independent curator Duygu Demir draws links between the twentieth-century artist and the origins of landscape painting in Turkey.

"The Yıldız paintings are almost 'screened images,' in that nature that is mediated through the photograph, which is then mediated further by oil on canvas. Reproductions of mechanical reproductions, they are odd precursors to the structural tactics that would be taken up by Gürman more than half a century later," wrote Demir.

Perhaps the best examples of Gürman's artistic quotations of the Yıldız paintings, which were based on photographs of landscaped palace grounds, are from his "Composition" series, enumerated as Nos. 6-9. These works, made in 1967, were curated together by Temür to convey how Gürman modified one consistent idea, varying its colors and shapes in context.

*Composition No. 6* is marked by sharp linearity, its seascape forming an artificial triangle against a camouflage green ground. The multilayered, intentional fakery of paintings conceived in the bygone Yıldız Palace tradition has a surrealistic tone in the hands of Gürman, who returns to naturalism with an eye for the hallucinatory powers of the human mind.

In Paris and in Istanbul, Gürman's practice explored an otherworldly military aesthetic. Insightful as a visual commentary on Western, industrial civilization, which is subconsciously and overtly driven by the might of the right, both his "Scheme" and "Montage" series are rife with that signature patchy swirl of greens and browns.

But in the creative progression that spanned his most active twelve years, he is not at all heavy-handed when approaching the graver themes that code military life as separate from the civilian domain, while each retains its uniformities. Nearly invisible, the image of a tank is collaged over cardboard in one of his pieces titled *Scheme* (1965).

In another piece from the "Scheme" series, a photographic print of a man in the garb of a blue-helmeted peacekeeper looks into the imaginative field of the artwork at the raised figure of an aerial bomb. The depth performed by the work of gouache and pencil on cardboard is compelling for its inward direction of focus.

Others are not so subtle. A height of deep green reaches up to a thin layer of blue sky, wherein wisps of cloud are overwhelmed by the unrealistic stretch of terrain in an untitled composition. Next to it, Temür chose to hang *Montage 4* (1967) in which a nearly identical range of colors and forms are blocked by red-and-white boards and strung with barbed wire.

His initial montage work, enumerated as "M1," is a triptych, painted with cellulose into a cold metal sheet of crosshatched, bolted paneling. The two that followed that series adapt camouflage netting, obscuring their title, seen in yellow lettering, "M2," and "M3," at their core. These works, and others, were drawn in *Notebook* (1965). Its pages were filmed for the show.

Leafing through the artist studies, drafted in Paris, the contents of his psyche are projected in a clear, organized fashion, straight from Istanbul's Salt archives where much of the artist's work has been preserved since gaining well-deserved attention following the more alternative currents of contemporary art appreciation in Turkey.

His masterwork is a collage he made in Istanbul with print and cellulose paint on paper. *The Dream of Neo-Classicism* (1975) has the ingenuity of Giorgio de Chirico, but is incomparable in its filmic poise. The figure at the top is also in *Appearance IV* (1973), from Italy, and reappears in the nine-piece sculpture, *Soldier* (1976), which was reinterpreted in 2013.

February 3, 12:14 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Master

The 183rd gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is a slim hallway within the massive Beaux-Arts building on Huntington Avenue, where a bustling streetcar filled with students runs parallel to the neoclassical colonnade along the museum facade, sealing its status as a house of culture and civilization. Its collections have grown in the last century to house some half a million artworks.

Adjacent to the show, *Reimagining Home*, pairing photographs by Iranian artists Gohar Dashti and Bahman Jalali, there is an antique-style rotunda of ceiling murals by expatriate American painter John Singer Sargent. In 1921 the far-flung Edwardian orientalist had returned to the city near his father's birthplace in Gloucester, Massachusetts, for the project as one of the most famed portraitists of his time.

Sargent had by then spent a significant amount of time in Ottoman lands, particularly the Levant, and brought back its styles and fashions for the benefit of himself and his patrons. One is of the daughters of Asher Wertheimer, a wealthy Jewish art dealer, whose daughter, Almina, is the subject of a painting in which she wears a jumbled, theosophical ensemble, adorned in a Persian costume, including a pearled turban, whilst playing an Indian tambura.

The painting, *Almina, Daughter of Asher Wertheimer* (1908) follows the Turquerie tradition popular throughout Europe from the late Renaissance until the Romantic era, aestheticizing Ottoman and Persian visual culture for Western tastes. That it is such a crucial, long moment in American art history as well, is why the exhibition of contemporary photography by Iranian artists resonates with peak sustain.

Facing the museum's distinctive Arts of Islamic Cultures collection, Dashti and Jalali are a welcome addition to the increasingly inclusive curatorial narrative at American arts institutions of late. Jalali is a preeminent academic and documentarian. His work is famed for bearing witness to the Iranian Revolution (1978-1979) and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), but he was an avid collector of anonymous, vintage photographs, which he has restored.

His series "Image of Imagination" is steeped in his interests as a curator and historian of Iran's Qajar era (1794-1925), when a dynasty of Turkic origins led the former Persian empire. Drawing from photographs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jalali created double exposures, aligning his original work with historical findings. The result is an exploration of collective and personal memory, of creativity as a realm somewhere between fiction and fact.

The potency of capturing tradition and modernity, in contrast, emerges sharply from Jalali's oeuvre throughout "Reimagining Home," the works of which are untitled, though placed within multiple series according to elements of the palette in which they are doubly exposed. In his "Black and White" series, Jalali simultaneously portrays the obscuration and merging of customary dress, long flowing robes and a tall variety of fezzes with that of armed military men.



In another piece from the "Black and White" series, the enlarged picture of a woman with bare legs stretches out across the breadth of the inkjet print. A row of men in Western suits stands behind her. Their gaze aligns with that of a modern seer, yet the female pose is awkward, implying a forced imposition of oriental allure. It seeps out of the image, toward a comment on the technology of the medium itself as contextualized within the outsider's gaze.

Jalali has the careful eye of a self-aware non-Western photographer, as he emphasizes the role of film itself in the history of colonization as part of a saga of representation among minorities, both within individual nations and more geopolitically. Iran, and other countries with Muslim majorities, are caught between worlds in the postcolonial age, which Jalali's photographs render with acute visual insight.

One work from the "Black and White" series shows a lone woman in local dress in front of an artificial landscape. She is seated on a bicycle, elevated, looking into the camera. Scattered lines of Persian script are written sideways and upside-down across the composition, setting the cultural scene. The photographer's "Red" series follows, also superimposing calligraphic sketches.

During the Iranian Revolution, demonstrators vandalized photography studios in defiance of Western cultural influences. Jalali shot the defaced sign of one of Isfahan's oldest studios, blending it with Qajar-era women, whose soft, emotionless expression juxtaposes dramatically with bold swathes of red and black Persian script. His approach to binary themes are enhanced by his coalescent focus on men and women.

Dashti learned the meaning of concept from Jalali. In the process, he taught her how photography could uniquely integrate both documentary record with imaginative creation. During the six years that it took Jalali to produce his "Image of Imagination" series, he was also busy imparting the philosophy behind his technical expertise to Dashti and his many students as a well-admired figure at Tehran University of Art.

Her series, "Home," is an unpeopled evocation of Jalali's approach to the manufacturing of postmodern mythology, further adapting and revitalizing the typecast, musty past of Iran and its cultural appropriation at the hands of predominant Western ignorance. And her images, like that of Jalali, advance the front of cultural erasure, and the open wounds of lost history. But as she explained, Iran has always had a different relationship to Western historiography.

"The 'Home' series is a project about the people. Maybe you cannot see the people, but it's about the people," she clarified in a video curated as part of her museum show.

And I think you can see this effect on my work and [on] a lot of Iranian contemporary artists that they say a story and they're going to be a storyteller because it's part of the culture. We don't document everything, but on the other hand we document our imagination.

The austerity of Dashti's photography leaps beyond her years, retracing the legacy of Eastern quality, when emotional restraint accumulates untold power to express such themes as belonging, exile and refuge. Born in 1980 in Ahvaz, and venturing through the abandoned buildings of Iran's second-largest city of Mashhad to conceive "Home," Dashti also collocated the wildness and domesticity of flowers, and plants, within empty residential spaces.

Likewise, the art photography of Jalali is deeply inspired by his newsworthy analysis of the society, its sweeping changes, and in the process, what it leaves behind. The physicality of space, in Dashti's hands, informed by the principles of Jalali's teachings, becomes metaphysical, enchanted with psychological complexity. With close, site-specific research into the vegetation and interiors that she captures, Dashti muses on the post-migrant zeitgeist.

February 9, 8:27 AM  
Boston, USA

## Multidisciplinary

In 2019, photographer Sıla Yalazan had just come off a major project in Tarlabaşı neighborhood in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, training her eye for the portraiture of inner-city youth in the mixed neighborhood that has become synonymous with Istanbul's struggle to balance neoliberal gentrification with the preservation of its histories. She found her calling as a photographer in that district years ago, and its people became the muse for her first solo show, *Forbidden Games*, held at Kiraathane Istanbul Literature House.

The faces and bodies that she captures through her lens are painted with emotion and resonate with the time that she spends at their side, inhabiting their space, humanizing the elements of their self-expression and placing accents on how they dress, look and even feel about themselves. Her medium, while steeped in the mechanics of depersonalized modern technology, is deeply informed by art history, particularly that of Bauhaus and the Russian avant-garde.

Known for her strange and irresistible self-portraits, photographer Gertrude Arndt often garbed herself in clothes that evoked the overpowering potential of fashion and its ability to bend gender and prep the body, psychologically and physically, for various activities, whether mourning in a black dress or stretching at the gym in tights. Yalazan drew inspiration from Arndt, who was most prolific in the 1930s but went unrecognized until the 1980s. Factory 20/20 placed a special significance on foregrounding women's contributions to the Bauhaus legacy.

Yalazan stepped into a venue called Arkaoda, in Kadıköy, where she first saw Kardelen Cici perform in the style of interactive vaudeville theater. All of the wildest sorts from the arts and lifestyle scenes were out singing, dancing and glamorously showing off their rainbows of human diversity. The atmosphere evoked the treasury of talent that emerged during the Weimar Era, Germany's first experiment in democracy, which spawned Bauhaus and other early modern movements that would galvanize new cultural expression around the world.

The fruit of their collaboration was on display at *The Shape of Things* inside KoloniX, neighboring a slew of other contemporary art galleries interspersed by antique shops, a blend of tradition and modernity between Tophane and Cihangir. Admittedly produced in just weeks, Yalazan stood behind the results of her photo shoots with Cici, installing a series of four double-exposure photographs that represent her creative pedagogy. Cici learned a slice of dance history, basing her poses on the Bauhaus choreography of Oskar Schlemmer.

After a six-year gestation, Schlemmer employed performer Elsa Hotzel to premiere *Triadic Ballet* in 1922. The piece became the most successful avant-garde contribution to dance at a time when modernism was just beginning to take hold of the form and its rigid, highbrow audiences. Turning the industrial paradigm of robotic automation into an art form was a proud moment for the Bauhaus school, where Schlemmer worked at the theater workshop. One hundred years later, Cici was adapting his vision for Istanbul's art lovers.

Mirroring one of Yalazan's photographs in which she is adorned in a caped robe ensemble designed by Lale İnceoğlu, Cici performed live for the Friday night opening to mark not only the first show at KoloniX but a new precedent for artistic collaboration within the Turkish culture sector. The empowerment of women in leadership roles, self-curation and independence from the art establishment are the crux of Factory 20/20 as an innovative social concept. Their motto is "Women in the Creative World."

Eight pieces of fashion by İnceoğlu are exhibited at *The Shape of Things*, including four that she designed exclusively for the show. Having worked in education as a teacher for over twenty years, İnceoğlu decided to take the helm of her creative life by studying fashion at Istanbul Moda Academy, culminating in her graduate collection, "Cosmic Love," from which she contributed to *The Shape of Things*. Her clothing celebrates primary colors, bold shapes and the retro-futurism of Bauhaus.

"When we got together to talk about a Neo-Bauhaus show, I considered doing new costumes, but then we decided that these were perfect for the kind of images and movement we wanted," İnceoğlu explained in writing.

Just like the Bowie glam rock costumes were inspired by the shapes and forms of Bauhaus, this collection was rooted in the colors of the Bauhaus and developed with a sort of glam-retro futuristic aesthetic. We wanted to give the dancer an air of mystique and give an overall 'darker' effect so we created it with a face mask.

"I met with Lale (İnceoğlu) and we were talking about feminist waves," said Cici, who identifies as an installation-based performance artist.

I brought a book about movements in art from the last two centuries. I mentioned Judy Chicago. I was really inspired by her work, *The Dinner Party* (1979), in my first year in college. I wrote about this. Something was inside of me always to do women's collaborative work. When I found Factory 20/20, I was feeling confident, because I was always in the men's world.

One of the best-integrated elements that makes the show buzz are a series of neon light sculptures by British designer April Key, who has called Istanbul home for seven years. Specializing in interiors, her talents complemented the space at KoloniX, which is less of a gallery cube than a concourse of three adjacent rooms which increasingly darkens toward a bare studio in the back in which Yalazan's videography projects against a piece by Key. Drawing from Istanbul's flea markets, her series "Ocean Drive" resurrects Bauhaus Miami.

After meeting a multigenerational artisan crafting neon out of a workshop in Kadıköy, Key devised sharply defined shapes, such as rectangles, cones, globes and triangles. Their plastic aesthetics harmonize seamlessly with her attention to vibrantly colored light, as her pieces beam with a spectrum to match the vivid dyes of İnceoğlu's clothing, Yalazan's video and Cici's

movements. And, midway between the blended collaborations of Factory 20/20's voice, the young artist Özge Çokgezen shows her video installation, *A Period of Colorful Actions*.

"All of the installations should be specific to the corners and spaces. I waited to see the exact point where I would show. This is my first solo expression," said Çokgezen, over the glitch electronica designed for her video by Ebru Gümrükçüoğlu.

I've been doing art since childhood and professionally since high school. I studied at two fine arts universities and worked at art organizations. In the public, it looks like I'm a businessperson. I started to write about myself and art life. I made this to show everyone I'm making art.

February 16, 10:11 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Gaze

Blue paper covers three glass doors. Inside, the walls are textured with a rough concrete finish. Place a hand on them, and the will to be elsewhere disappears. And no one will see, because the interior is a world within a world. Bent and obscure, the streets outside are a pastiche of unspeakable silences, wayward possibilities and undrawn maps. The bright lights above beam, shock and blanket artwork in the miracle of seeing. And that is what the artist intends to inspire in his faithful seers.

To look is more passive than to gaze. The latter implies a concentrated, meditative staring tantamount to hypnosis, an altered state of mind, induced by the innate, human power to merge the mind with the eye. The illuminations of consciousness await. All that is asked is to open that involuntary mask of lids that keep a person from tripping. But to step into the space of Öktem Aykut is to enter into a realm where the subtle, genuine air of creativity is intact and flowing in circles of a consolidated momentum led by the young pair of gallerists.

Selim Birsal is a welcome addition to the exhaustive history of artworks exhibited at Öktem Aykut, mounting hundreds of shows in their former space around the corner within eyeshot of the cobblestoned shadow of Galata Tower. Now, down a flight of stairs across the street from alternative galleries under Adahan Hotel and at the Kıraathane Istanbul Literature House, Öktem Aykut has preserved its distinctive place, as a conceptual sphere whose core is untouched, while its surfaces mingle liberally with the greater milieu of the Turkish art world.

*Passive Defence* (2020) is an installation concept piece that bears something of the trickster role of the contemporary artist, a stripe of behavior well applied by Ayşe Erkmen for *Whitish*, her solo retrospective at Arter. But as Birsal wisely considers, sight is also a function of its opposite. The pitch darkness of the cinema is what stirs the scintillant flow of its projected, celluloid magic. In like spirit, the show, *An Isolated Gaze* at Öktem Aykut offers a telescopic entrance to a night sky of such broad perspectives on the visible of creation.

Jumping off from a composition of ink on paper conceived in 2017, titled, *States of Planet I*, Birsal adapted his circular focus into a sequel, and a new vision, *Tank Lilium* (2019) after similar color schemes and explorations of form. With resemblances to a hydra-headed incarnation of that self-reproductive being known to Greek mythology, Birsal's ink painting expands the notion to a modern military subject, however abstracted and transformed into the image of a flower, or more exactly a lily. But with an industrial twist, the Lilium has become a buzzword for an electric-powered commercial air taxi invented by a German startup. And with Birsal's ecological futurism at hand, the simple image of a post-impressionistic flower gains ground in the field of science fiction, in which technological empowerment, independent of the prevailing infrastructure, has unseen, more nefarious consequences than ever imagined. Yet, for all of its context, there is beauty in his scarlet petals, run through with jade filaments over a mottled lime background.

His other two large-scale works of ink on paper on display, stretch about one hundred and fifty square centimeters and have the mesmerizing effect of situating an objective, planetary observation of Earth through a personalized, creative lens, and, more in the mythopoetic guise of Gaia, as a single organism. Whether covered in a verdant array of leaves, or darkened feathers spruced with crimson fletches, the avian globe flies, motivated by the principles of a perennial garden, which Birsell's show explicitly expresses in its curatorial text.

“As in all attrition and collapse, he suggests that we start by focusing on our own garden, reorganizing it with what we have come to find in our sacks, and making it bloom again,” reads the gallery statement by Öktem Aykut, in which they identify Birsell's practice as a conceptual frame encompassing collective impulses that defined the spiritual and intellectual histories of the Enlightenment, Ancient Greece and Mesopotamia. “To do this, we need to redefine both the contents of our sack and our garden and to persevere with goodwill.”

The first of two floors at Öktem Aykut featured a long-term installation, developed over the course of a quarter-century, titled, *What Expense* (1995-2020). A pile of wood and rubber stamps is strewn beneath a square column, set on the cracked stone ground at the feet of two paintings. The roughly hewn blocks are blackened with ink, barely revealing their cuts, modeling the weaponized vehicles of armed industrialism. A tent canvas sprawls from a corner of the gallery, detailing a spattered collage of faded stamps. Up a cold stairwell, the artist's “Red” (2006) series floats, ascending along the bare wall. The piece, *Isolated House*, is especially fitting for the motifs, and lexicography of the show. Also devised with ink on paper, the textural flushes animate a burnt aesthetic, of a blank landscape flooded with fire and blood, darkening cloud-like at its center, wherein the silhouette of a lone house stands at the swirling cusp of a postmodern impressionist's whims. The pieces in “Red” are macabre enough to blind with a deep gloom evoked by their titles.

The figure of a gunslinging solitary man is portrayed beset by emptiness, in *Running For No Reason*, only to confront with such nightmarish renderings as *Red Desert Storm*, *Spitting Blood*, and *A Bowl of Pain*. But more abstract than representational, Birsell has ever found his muse in the classic, painterly ambiance of the French countryside. In late 2017, together with Sinan Logie, he presented a series of works celebrating the legacy of L'Estaque, a village near Marseille where Cezanne developed much of his post-impressionist style.

*Variable Skies* (2019) is comprised of ten ink paintings on paper, topping off Birsell's inaugural Öktem Aykut show, *An Isolated Gaze*, with refreshed insights into his practice, which while also steeped in conceptualism and trans-disciplinary multimedia, remains, at once, approachable in its simplicity. His colors are as unique as the moods of his naturalist forms, which carefully, like the hint of a riddle, are heard softly, recurring in thoughts often forgotten, but that return with the sharpness of clarity that prompts the act of stillness on a cold winter's day.

February 24, 1:39 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Brightly

It is dark on the fourth floor of the Mısır Apartment building on Istiklal Avenue, the home of multiple art spaces. A single spotlight reflects off one side of a hallway leading through to a dim, red haze. On one side, a text in Turkish explains certain details about the installation in a style familiar to art-goers. It is more obscure in expression, transcending the literal didactics of art-speak toward a holistic embrace of the visuality of language itself as integral and seamlessly subtextual to works of visual art.

The relationship between literal text and visual art has a history that spans the origins of both mediums, as separate and of a common source. Moderns often express their relativity as a merging of their forms, while their distinctions are still subject to overeducated exercises of verbose, abstruse argumentation and a wide variety of creative practices that have either yet to be categorized, or which have slipped through the cracks of critical definition. The interior, architectural design for *Everything Interesting Takes Place in the Dark* is vital to its concept.

On the ambitious road to confronting the prehistoric predicament that rages when differentiating the appreciation of visual art as both unique from language and intertwined with its manifestations, Aslı Çavuşoğlu is Turkey's most promising emissary. With her works in the permanent collections of the prestigious Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and finalizing her solo exhibition at the New Museum in the Bowery of that island city last year, Çavuşoğlu is not only young, born in 1982, but indispensable. Simply, her voice matters.

And along one of the rowdiest streets in Istanbul, with the infamy and glory of Istiklal clamoring sleeplessly, she speaks in silence in a linguistic script yet to be seen but drawn from close documentation of street art, graffiti and its alternative tradition of counterattack additions, a conflict-ridden autonomous collective impulse that has antecedents as far back as the first cave painters whose fearful murals of big cats and stampeding herds are the results of tens of thousands of years of repainting and alteration.

But inside Galeri Nev Istanbul, the ambiance is more cutting edge, its crimson fade increasing in vibrancy approaching the work itself, which is around the corner in the basic cube-like frame of one of Turkey's more seasoned commercial galleries. Out of immediate view, *Everything Interesting Takes Place in the Dark* has a psychodynamic allure. Mike Nelson executed an aesthetically similarly immersive light installation for his site-specific series of sculptures and videos, titled, PROJEKTÖR (Gürün Han).

Yet, where Nelson activated a decidedly unstylish nook in the old town within the walls of ancient Constantinople, what is now mostly known as the inner-city district of Fatih, Çavuşoğlu stepped aside – not exactly forward into a different vision of the future. Her art has the enveloping capacity to transport its viewers into an alternate present. The piece, despite exuding a lit charge, is entrancing, as the bewildering shapes of its fictive alphabet are as uncanny as they are comprehensible.



Evading complete opacity in the face of utter originality is the talent that Çavuşoğlu maintains as a world-class artist born of a Turkish milieu in which contemporaries are besieged by a largely chauvinistic culture sector. As language is a bastion of national affirmation, her art serves as an antidote against an air of monolithic toxicity. While reminiscent of Turkish letters and bearing the same number of them, 29, *ANNEX* adapts the Latinization of its script into an electric scheme of formal variations.

And still, a patient seer may gaze and discern the correlation of *ANNEX* to Turkish, reading the wall text side-by-side. That her font is practical, even legible, is her contribution to art's potential to trigger the transformative nature of seeing. In a corner of the art world where explication, politics and history are essential keys to unlocking greater public awareness of new cultural expression, *Everything Interesting Takes Place in the Dark* is an anthem to deeper complexities, and the individual impulse to gain knowledge independent of popular account.

The retro trend to refocus the hyper-digital, post-realism of early twenty-first-century art back to the late twentieth century is finding an apt channel of release in unbroken lines of neon artisans. For his contribution to the 16th Istanbul Biennial, artist Glenn Ligon utilized neon as vessels through which to mark calendar dates. Ligon's oeuvre is greatly indebted to the inventions of language, and his approach to the resonant character of neon was a welcome nuance within his pack of installations at the Mizzi Mansion on Büyükada island.

More recently, a young, British sculptor and light designer April Key participated in an all women's group show in Çukurcuma for which she researched and collaborated with a multigenerational neon-making workshop in Kadıköy. The organic contours of her neon tubing were to recreate the Art Deco wave of mid-twentieth century Miami, though when switched off, their sculptural platforms evoked a Neo-Bauhaus order of minimalist industrialism. Çavuşoğlu is also a pragmatist when it comes to her employment of neon beyond the look of their radiations.

“In each piece, the primary marks are rendered in a cooler tone, while the overlays are presented in a hotter one. Through this superimposition, the audience can differentiate the coded letters hidden beneath their attempted erasure,” wrote Adam Kleinman in an essay accompanying the show's duration.

This paradox predicated on a word being both present and absent, provokes the reader to wrestle with the author to establish intention as well as to question the very nature of signification itself.

Not far from Galeri Nev Istanbul, down the overburdened city's European slopes to Dolapdere, the veteran Turkish contemporary artist Ayşe Erkmen launched her solo show at Arter with a piece, *Typed Text* (2019), playing with the fundamental concept of perception, framing her retrospective of works so that eyes may speak, and tongues see. But in her non-referential, standalone piece, *Everything Interesting Takes Place in the Dark*, Çavuşoğlu created the *ANNEX* font with designer Özer Yalçınkaya as an invitation.

To peer into the light that is *Everything Takes Place in the Dark* is to enter a nebulous nether realm of the international art world, a reality parallel to normalized, quotidian life, but not exactly bound to natural laws that might seem universal, for its cerebral, malleable environment of conceptual and plastic engineering, in which most knowledge and experience is remote, past, and scattered, particularly in Turkey, where exportation, exile and diaspora are mainstays of the current generation's artistic character, of which Çavuşoğlu is exhibit A.

February 26, 4:57 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Altar

In 2001, the museum art photographer Thomas Struth captured a geometrically precise frame in which the Great Altar of Pergamon stands tall and bold in the island core of Berlin, where it has been exalted since the late nineteenth-century; when German imperialists snatched it from Ottoman lands. It is not only a holy pagan relic but a monumental masterpiece of classical Grecian architecture.

A close look reveals how most people in Struth's photograph are not actually looking at the colonnades, built in a triad of elegant rows above a platform of gleaming white marble stairways, nor the gigantomachy reliefs, detailing one of the most precious and dramatic scenes ever carved from stone. Individuals within the dispersed crowd are generally looking up and away out of the picture, or at each other.

Struth depicted the tension subtly by showing how fickle popular attention is, as so many sit on the steps with their backs to the magnum opus of human creativity. It is with a similar attitude that Istanbul's art-goers approach *Bergama Stereotip* by Cevdet Erek, whose work is a remount from its recent appearance at Hamburger Bahnhof. With its reinstallation in the heart of Turkey's contemporary art landscape in Beyoğlu, his piece has taken on a new life.

Altered from its sleek, metallic aesthetic of industrial blacks and steely silvers, which were appropriate for the Hamburger Bahnhof interior, a former rail station, *Bergama Stereotip* is strikingly in contrast with its deep cochineal ochre. This reflects the traditional color of Istanbul's old residential architecture, now often seen with modern touches in the sloping, verdant neighborhoods along the Bosphorus.

Also, more transparent than its past Berlin incarnation, *Bergama Stereotip* entrances through its cage-like bowels, pulsing in time with the diaspora currents of its thirteen-channel soundscape of amplifiers and loudspeakers. The installation projects original percussion music by Erek, computer programmed through an audio interface that flickers in the vermillion edifice, slicing up excerpts and effects from his solo album, *Davul* (2017).

The repetition, its minimalist edge, against the expansive interpretation the ancient monument makes for a bewildering dynamic. It has the dead weight of an abstract art object set to a confounding scale. While less grand than in Berlin, the rectangular formalism of its installation Istanbul is at once Delphic while defined by rudimentary architectural lines that ease comprehension, perhaps too much.

That viewers may ascend its steps and grasp at the blazing, crimson rafters, take in the tasteful charge of cymbals paced to a slow, steady rhythm, as a bass drum keeps time, evoking both an ear for Anatolian folk music, and Berlin's sleepless electronica. Yet the music, like the empty and resounding squares of the sculptural construction, is either too rigid or unbalanced in its attempt to incorporate simplicity in a mutual relationship with the prodigious.

Together with curator Selen Ansen, Cevdet Ereğ has completed a cyclical course of reason, incited by his approach to music, fusing the Anatolian bass drum, known as the davul, with guttural, animalistic voices that faintly caress the aural field around *Bergama Stereotip*. And in Arter's first-floor gallery, the acoustic reverberation is immersive, yet moves with a faint touch, as to recall the distance of the Pergamon altar from its original, Hellenized ecology on a lofty acropolis near İzmir.

“As it was already the case in Bochum and Berlin with Bergama Stereo, Ereğ conceived the dimensions, outline and body of his work according to the proportions and perspectives of space – with the wish to give the audience the possibility of adjusting their distance from it,” reads Arter's curatorial statement for *Bergama Stereotip*.

With the help of the mobile and transient aspects of sound, it offers the possibility of experiencing the proximity of distance.

In its defense, the symbolic return of the Pergamon altar to Turkey is momentous since its fragmentary departure from the antique soil of Asia Minor began in 1879. It was reinforced by a German-Ottoman agreement spearheaded by Otto von Bismarck, the first chancellor of unified, imperial Germany, for 20,000 gold marks and a nod at the Congress of Berlin. In the guise of contemporary art, the muses of its inception resurface in the sounds of its native land.

February 28, 4:57 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Horse

It is not difficult to imagine Sylvia Plath broken-hearted, contemplative, even brooding as she gazes toward an open field to watch a harem of horses. She trains her focus on their long tails and bushy manes, and clasps her hands. The workaholic poetess, whose untimely death by suicide cursed American letters and global feminism, wanted to possess the horses as she would the clouds and the leaves. It is evident in the opening lines of her poem, *The Eye-Mote*, written in 1959 after she recovered from a splinter in her eye.

From the last stanza in *The Eye-Mote*, curators Bahar Güneş and Öykü Demirci adapted the poetry of Plath into a multimedia exhibition of visual art. The title, *Horses Fluent in the Wind*, is a direct quotation from the poem that ends with the visionary wordsmith pining for somewhere, somewhen, out of the box of her confining thoughts and her vulnerable body. About their closure, as premature as Plath's exit from the world, Halka Art continued the title of the exhibition, or *Flying From the Nest*.

In a compact room around the corner from the entranceway, through the quaint quarters in which Halka Art emerged some three years ago, after its last move, to house resident artists and hold exhibitions and events as part of their progressive programming, *Horses Fluent in the Wind or Flying From the Nest* features works characteristic to the curatorial pattern within the modest space. The works have a softness, a fragility that expresses the nostalgia and beauty of the embryonic creative impulse.

It is with a certain sadness that Halka Art has been ousted from its place in the local community due to the competitive, rapidly gentrifying economic climate in which contemporary art is increasingly sidelined in favor of more immediate, popular commodities. This confrontation with disaster capitalism has unfortunately decided the fate of small-scale entrepreneurial ventures and more traditional business models across the planet. However, resiliently, Halka Art has made history with its stand.

Drawn from her contribution to the 2016 exhibition at Halka Art, *Atlas of Sleepless*, Yasemin Nur sketched phoenix-like birds, wispy as fire, over transparent paper and cut their thin, brittle shapes out to make a series of two-dimensional sculptures that rest on the palms of hands photographed in soft light, their prints hanging over a shelf, nearly bare except for a smattering of vegetal objects crafted from the artist's imagination, many placed in a shallow box of leaves and petals.

A scrap of a page suspends against the roughly spackled white wall beside the gently displayed works, its burnt edges evoking the mark of lost time. In its center, a cutout of an arboreal landscape is sharply outlined, rising into the jagged emptiness of negative space. With a like-minded delicacy, artist Slobodan Dan Paich impressed ink onto a page to conceive his piece, *From Obscurity to Luminosity Inwardly in One Lifetime*. The digital print of the work at Halka Art resonates with his frequent presence in the residential gallery.

In the low light of early morning, Paich can be seen across the street from Halka Art in a warm cafe, listening to spiritual music from the Anatolian heartland as he dips a brush in soup and tea to craft his idiosyncratic approach to postmodern draftsmanship. He searches, not for the skill to execute his idea, but for a vision, born of necessity, simply to create. And with a slow manner of speaking, sinking in his chair, the academic by training is visited by the muse and laughs inwardly, in silent communion with his invisible life partner.

Hanging at the end of a single rope, the figure in Paich's drawing *From Obscurity to Luminosity Inwardly in One Lifetime* could be seen as a metaphor for Halka Art in its current, liminal state. The individual swings from the darkness with his legs outstretched to reach for enlightenment, one that by its image alone conjures hope. The grainy quality of the composition, like an early photograph, has a careful sensuality. The illumined is absolute and untouchable, and breaches the gloom but is not dimmed.

*Horses Fluent in the Wind or Flying From the Nest* spreads its wings across four gallery rooms on three floors throughout Halka Art. In a whitewashed back hall where performances, workshops and talks of all kinds have been organized, an untitled artwork by Sevil Tunaboylu stirs imaginary reminiscences of *The Eye-Mote*, with its oil painting of a horse trotting through a snowy, winter landscape, yet with a surrealist window at its top-right corner opening out to a bare, summery mountain horizon under blue skies.

The effect is that of a scene within a scene, almost like the sequence of rooms within Halka Art, filled with artworks that triumph in their remote poetics of pure, visual invention. Obliquely, that sense is captured by Sezgi Abalı in her series of archival pigment prints, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being Dust* (2018). Three successively smaller photographs hang beside a birdhouse, its entry hole overflowing with creepers that obscure the portrayal of a person, covered in thick, dark green vegetation.

The domestic interior, overcome with an overgrown, invasive plant, zooms out to reveal a pastoral landscape, in which a lonely white house is set against a murky forest blanketed by an overcast sky. On a related theme, one of the more striking series at the show is by watercolorist Sevda Bad, who doubles as an art management communications professional at Halka Art. Her paintings *Life is Running* (2019) awaken the aesthetic and content of family photo albums, but from the old days when folks gathering in front of a camera was a special occasion.

One of her black-and-white works has the effect of a historical grab, foregrounding a patriarch who dons a 1970s sport jacket, his collars popping with charismatic pizzazz as he grasps the shoulder of his headscarf-wearing wife. She is plainly garbed in kitchen wear and slippers, nervously grabbing her knees, covered in loose-fitting, homebound pajamas. They are a sizable Anatolian family with five children. Above their kitschy frame, in another work enclosed in wood, Bad painted seven skirted aunties standing in a field.

Another welcome contribution to *Horses Fluent in the Wind or Flying From the Nest* came from the reputed Turkish-American artist Nancy Atakan. Her piece is a collection of digitally printed drawings on cloth, titled, *Loss for One is Birth for the Other* (2018). Inspired by Plath, she followed the poet's line of thought concerning the duplicitous nature of retrospection when applied to the fleeting nature of momentary experience. And her artwork attests to deeper schemes of interdependent, personal and environmental changes in the face of urbanization.

March 8, 11:55 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Foolery

His cartoonish visage is unmistakable. Yet, his name evades collective memory. One of the most storied and colorful figures from the Yeşilçam era, Cevat Kurtuluş was a film extra, roaming the famously nostalgic street off İstiklal Avenue that has become synonymous with Turkey's golden age of cinema. Lasting from 1952 to 1977, its copious movies are marked by the site-specific social ecology from which they emerged, similar to Broadway or Hollywood.

The man had a rotund midsection, a bulbous schnoz and flappy ears. He had a goofy smile that beamed through the perfect circles of his wide eyes, lightening his infectious smile. Often playing subordinate types such as the waiter, butler or driver, whether garbed in overalls or a tuxedo, his comic air could spark a flame following even the deadest dud of a bad joke, gifted with the physical timing of a silent actor.

In his hands, the eight-millimeter camera that he learned to wield moves with an erratic swing, capturing uncanny slices of his personalized world with a surprisingly genuine knack for showing the fleeting allure and informal atmosphere that also makes his sense of humor tick. Portrayals of fellow actors, like Comma and Dot, a duo out for cheap thrills, are as richly documented as his collegial impersonators of cross-dressers, urbanites and villagers.

Suited to the nines in black-and-white attire, he skips for a dance with a trio of misfits, including a hefty, rural man in a white cap, beside a short, plaid-jacketed gent of the night and finally a bewigged bloke in a dress. The latter two form an unlikely couple as they promenade arm-in-arm within a bucolic setting, surrounded by forest on all sides. The revelers do not hold back their laughter. In true theatrical tradition, they are out to make fun of human role-playing.

Ege Berensel installed his exploratory homage to Kurtuluş via twelve vintage television monitors in four exhibition rooms throughout the multistory, seaside apartment complex currently housing AVTO, wherein Istanbul's more intrepid art-goers will also delight in the scenic vistas along the Bosphorus thoroughfare of Kuruçeşme Avenue. In the vein of the late avant-garde auteur Jonas Mekas, Berensel concocted a sequential potpourri of spliced, found footage.

Recovered from Istanbul's undiscovered troves of historical memorabilia strewn across the flea markets and junkyards that punctuate the sprawling cityscape with seductive abandon, Berensel spent about fifteen years poring over the eight-millimeter reels that Kurtuluş shot with uninhibited joy and curiosity. Now, the collection belongs to the Kurtuluş family, many of whom are also depicted on casual, summery days through his roving lens.

Titled as his 2019 series, *Extra: Filmogram 1-12*, Berensel's experimental films flash at AVTO with unrelenting intrigue, projecting a kind of insomniac grab that might trigger a flagrant renunciation of time's passage from its unsuspecting audience. And with a special ear for melding original soundtrack to the soundless moving images on display, speakers set at the foot of the screens blare with unhinged, percussive noise.



The aggressive first impressions styled by Berensel's background music are reminiscent of that produced by Glenn Ligon for the pair of videos he screened as part of his contribution to the 16th Istanbul Biennial, *Taksim 1 and 2*. And the videography demonstrates an angle on settings that, at once, might seem entirely normal, but when reflected through an artist's singular recording, becomes otherworldly.

Inside each of the quartet of exhibition rooms, trios of monitors are propped up to display the Kurtuluş remix that Berensel devised out of his monolithic field of interests in which he immerses himself. Based in Ankara, the artist was born in Muğla in 1968 and despite a stint lecturing on aesthetics and criticism at Middle East Technical University (METU) in 2013, has generally shied away from entering the spotlights of the art world as a name brand creator.

But where some may take one step back, AVTO leaps two steps forward, sharing with Istanbul an altogether unique approach to the art space model, transforming the normative gallery view with its anti-capitalistic stance steeped in the Milanese milieu in which co-founder Sarp Özer received his education in curatorial studies. For the show, *Cevdat Kurtuluş*, AVTO and Berensel took a deep dive into the subconscious imagination of Turkish popular culture.

For their public exhibition, the team AVTO wrote the following: "Scrutinizing how film operates through what is rendered tacit and explicit, 'Cevat Kurtuluş' is a visual research project that emanates from the 8mm film records of theatre and cinema actor Cevat Kurtuluş. The work attempts to shed light on the Yeşilçam Cinema era's previously off-screen space, imaginary-space, labor-space obscured by the camera."

The films of Kurtuluş invite seers into a world that, until Berensel embarked on his investigatory practice, has remained largely invisible. There is a clarity to his moments of capture, suffused with a candid honesty that enshrines them as valuable documents in the history of Turkey's cultural sector. In Berensel's hands, the environments in which film professionals worked and lived in the mid-twentieth century Istanbul are freshly reevaluated.

There is an abundance of the slapstick creative energy that burst around Kurtuluş as his light-hearted presence showered those around him with a positive levity that appeared to instill coworkers and family alike with buoyant happiness. Despite the gravity of the political situations that were then curtaining Turkish citizens behind the walls and fears of the Cold War, the Yeşilçam era of cinema retorted a powerful, tragicomic mockery of the human condition.

Among the reels in color, such as for Berensel's *Extra: Filmogram 03*, Kurtuluş squats on a vibrant green lawn, wearing bright, cobalt-hued denim. A woman in a muted purple headscarf looks on with a peculiar interest, standing in front of a simple country house painted sky blue. Her red dress almost glows beside a pair of long-haired dogs. In his worker's beret, Kurtuluş is then seen wrapping his arms around two costumed confidants, all waiting to shoot.

The hulking jokester of a man runs headlong over the grass past a film camera, where he stops to talk with the crew. Everyone lounges about under the sun, making merry and whiling away the day as they watch Kurtuluş give a performance. Hardly prosaic, Berensel conveyed something of the magic of cinema, the art of realizing the moveable imagination with a mechanical version of the eye, which remembers exactly, instantly, even if obscurely.

March 15, 7:15 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Distancing

A border is often conceived as peripheral. It connotes a frontier, the last gasp of pioneers out for a venture to see just how far they could go before confronting the other. But through the lens of Fatma Bucak, borders are exactly where connections are made and fostered, where new lands are seen and different peoples embraced. Still, her works are suffused with macabre moods, sharpened by her eye for pointing ever so directly at the greater context of an image, without picturing it.

In 2018, Bucak mounted a series of site-specific installations at Pi Artworks, a gallery in Istanbul headquartered in London. The show, titled, *A World of Ten Thousand Things*, referred to the Chinese dictum that touches on Taoist numerology. The essential idea is that there is only so much diversity issuing from the material world and that repetition comes in waves that, while imperceptible to most, adhere to certain patterns of creation. The artist is arguably one of the only roles in human work tasked with identifying these mythopoetic motifs.

*A World of Ten Thousand Things* brought Bucak to the border of Mexico and the United States, where she grappled with the themes of abandonment and survival common to human narratives along one of the most contested borderlands in the world due to the economic disparity between the divided sides. One work at the show leaped from her digitized videography and onto the terrace of the gallery, where she erected a broken column and stacked a pile of dead fish atop its severed figure, expressing a physical metaphor for Istanbul's nostalgic port.

For the online edition of Hong Kong's Art Basel, a series of photographs titled, *A Study of Eight Landscapes* by Bucak is carefully curated via an online viewing room, eliciting much of the aesthete taste that she has grabbed and wrangled throughout her early but immensely successful career. Born in 1984, her artwork has flown around the world and appeared in flagship institutions throughout Turkey, including at Arter and Odunpazarı Modern Museum.

*A Study of Eight Landscapes* traverses borderlines from the U.S. and Mexico back to the artist's second home in Turkey, as she also splits her time in London. After finding discarded objects close to Armenia and Syria, her spirit of adventure for the easternmost extremities of Anatolia made for an otherworldly collection of sculpted and modeled figments of her far-flung observations, captured with deadpan sincerity. *A border view* (2015) might be near-homophonic with "a broader view," but it appears to internalize a deeply narrow pain.

*A border view* is grim. Its interior could have been shot at a detention center but for an animal skull that rests cleanly and presentably upright on dirty, cold flooring. There is an interplay of the blackness of night against hospital white between the fragment of a skeleton and a soiled garment hanging on the wall. Whether it is blood or dirt smeared through its light fabric remains a mystery, but the mortal truths behind its conveyance are clear. A border is also symbolic of that liminal space between life and what lies beyond the grave.

While simply photographed at her studio, the energy of the found objects that she has aestheticized through her extraordinary visual scope resonate with the polarizing environments from which they were extracted, where compromises born of resistance to authority and opposition to the norm breed unhindered. As for her 2018 show, Bucak returned to an artifact reminiscent of ancient architecture placed beside perishable food. *In incomplete history* (2014) has a smooth bowl carved into a block of marble next to a round loaf of bread.

And further cleverly adapting regional Turkish themes into a visual reconnaissance of traditional objects, she photographed *Promised Land* (2014) of a folded Anatolian carpet and two strikingly evocative eggs. The mental effect transcends reconciliation with verbal or logical thinking. But from a place of distinct first impressions, Bucak's work *Fall* (2013) merges installation and model photography within a prepared setting outdoors, not inside the artist's studio as with the other works but stretching from end to end of the frame.

*Fall* shows a redhead standing unsure in a Martian landscape of maroon-hued earth atop a pile of boulders. The erosion surrounding the human figure cuts through the extraterrestrial landscape. From a safe distance, through images of images – viewing scenes manufactured by the mind of a remote artist – the imagination has ample room to feel the first rumbles of an earthquake just beginning to stoke fear in the heart of the unclothed, abstracted interplanetary traveler under a cliff, touching down after a long journey among the stars.

For its contribution to Art Basel, another Istanbul gallery, Dirimart, included two works by Ayşe Erkmen as part of its group show concept, *Deconstruction*, including Ebru Uygun and duo Özlem Günyol and Mustafa Kunt, among others. Erkmen has approximated the impact of Bucak's photograph, *Fall*, with her painterly sculpture series, "not the color it is." The piece *rosa* (2015) creates the ambiance of a hill on Mars, only lightened by a coral hue. Its slabs of hard paint stand up, amassing into an eruption of otherwise two-dimensional expressionism.

The phenomenon of passing over from pictorial flatness to structural verticality is similar to experiencing the world more digitally, prompted by the universal cause to self-isolate in the name of health, so as to prevent the runaway spread of disease. It incites an act of merging multiple forms of perception into a unified order of consciousness, something that Ebru Uygun practiced to create her mixed media work on canvas, *Light of Memory I* (2019), a paper-like flow of golden rivulets that course across the surface exterior and reflect back, gleamingly.

But perhaps the most intriguing piece exhibited by Dirimart, and by those representing the Turkish art world, is a painting by U.S.-based Hayal Pozanti. Her piece, *1993 (The year that Turkey first established a connection to the internet)* (2017), refers to a moment in history when the artist was ten years old. Born in Istanbul, Pozanti made a name for herself following a prestigious education at Yale University.

The work, *1993 (The year that Turkey first established a connection to the internet)*, buzzes with her finesse for integrating printmaking and digital art into the traditional medium of paint. And

through semi-abstraction, she quotes the delicious heydays of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, when the likes of Keith Haring made the rounds with his voluptuous, graffiti-minded, almost calligraphic style. It is her musing on these visual concerns that reminds everyone with the power of sight that humanity as a whole has long gone down unusual paths, ever onward.

March 22, 4:40 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Portraiture

Of the many muses of Henri Matisse, one was a Moldovan Jewish refugee who also modeled for painters Aristide Maillol and Pierre Bonnard. More akin to the bold, rotund lines of Maillol's female figures sculpted into polished stone and metal, than the exotic colorations of Bonnard, Matisse drew the immortal beauty of Dina Vierny with a singular sweep of his pointed sketches, fading off the page like an echo, or a wisp of smoke.

In the oils of Fahrelnissa Zeid, who won perennial admiration among art circles in Paris with large-scale canvases stylizing Byzantine and Islamic geometries with the Eastern mystique of her elite Ottoman upbringing, Olivier Lorquin, the son of Vierny, is the subject of the first of twenty-seven portraits displayed for the Zeid show at Dirimart, an Istanbul-based contemporary art gallery established in 2002. Her aesthetics are decidedly more akin to that of Bonnard, as the boy's features have a pellucid vibrancy.

*Portrait of Olivier Lorquin* (1959) is a fitting open to *A Three-Character Play*, as many of the works are of child figures, with the inclusion of Vierny herself in muted colors, looking out through the signature big eyes of Zeid's soul-searching portraiture, almost reminiscent of Margaret Keane. Finally, the clinching piece is a documentary by Lorquin, commissioned by Zeid in 1974. As it was never broadcasted, the screening of it at Dirimart is a rare window into her art.

"Naturally, of course, art is an extension of the artist, an extension of the artist's inner life. We see the inner life of the artist reflected in her works of art," said Zeid's daughter Shirin Devrim in Lorquin's film, *Fahrelnissa Zeid à Paris 1949-1975*, elaborating high-mindedly like the actress she was, and author of *A Turkish Tapestry*, based on conversations with her mother. "Although Fahrelnissa is my mother, I can only really know her by knowing her works."

By the creative logic of her intellectually elegant daughter, Zeid's self-portraiture indicates the artist's insatiable hunger to learn more about herself by painting. The show has technically two self-portraits, with pencil on paper from the 1930s and with pen in 1951. Zeid painted *Fahrelnissa* (1983) in her eighties, although it is of herself as a child. By the mirror of age, to conceive the self at the beginning of life at the end of life draws infinite kineses.

The two Zeid self-portraits curated for display at Dirimart show the artist's face at a semi-profile, looking back, as it were, from elsewhere, toward her work, herself. It would appear that she was not entirely self-conscious in the same light as she was with her more objective pieces, of others and of mythical figures, like *Woman with a Snake* (1985), or of the many untitled portraits.

*Self-portrait* (1930s) is exacting in its realism, a highly disciplined, naturalist study of the lines of the artist's own face, her uncompromising beauty which won her marriage into Hashemite royalty. But short-haired, and with an upraised eyebrow that reveals her intellectual eccentricity,

Zeid was as ambitious as she was ravishing. Some twenty years later, *Moi* (1951) is less flattering, both artistically and in her self-representation as an entangled fray of scribble.

Perhaps owing to her immersion in family life, as a devoted mother, wife and daughter, Zeid painted the closest people to her differently than she would others, or her more adventurous imaginings. It is evident in the pair of portraits made of her niece, Füreya Koral, one of which could be excavated from the site of Roman antiquity, as it has the young Füreya watercolored in profile within a circular frame, adorned with a blue headband and cropped hair.

Both works, *Portrait of Füreya Koral*, from 1926 and 1945, detail the inner harmony and creative passion that carried Koral into fame herself, as Turkey's preeminent early modern ceramicist of note, bringing the traditional plastic art from the soil of Anatolia into the modern worlds of art and business. Although the 1945 piece is a pencil drawing, Zeid's portraiture of her niece features some of her finest work, demonstrating her art as the transmission of kindred love.

Yet, it is in the seven untitled works at *A Three-Character Play* that impress the force of visionary originality that possessed Zeid throughout her life. The first numbered is an undated oil on canvas of an androgynous person in a green top. The sideways glance of their blue eyes, the puff of hair that fades into a black background and the redness of their pouting lips make for a lively, entrancing figure that is as real as it is perceived.

Her other untitled works appear like fiction that gives the reader the sensation that the words they are hearing in their minds must be telling them a true story, for it cannot be that they are fancied by a remote individual, just picking out thoughts like old, stray hairs. An oil painting in 1979, of a child in a yellow turtleneck, has that mesmerizing documentary quality.

But it was Zeid herself who said that she strayed away from painting a person as a photograph captures an image. There is only so much realism behind her portraiture, only so much naturalism in her paintings. With a sturdier gaze, its strokes are animated with their own soul. Dirimart reasserted her point with a wall text beside her portrait of Sara Koral, her grandniece.

"This is not a photo," her words translate, with poetic gravity, beside her undated oil, *Portrait of Sara Koral*, which shows the exquisitely dressed young lady in a red gown up to the waist, bejeweled in pearls with a dazzling air befitting her family culture. "It is the picture of the soul of the person I have made. All the inner life, the past, all civilizations that have come and gone appear at that moment in front of me."

It is safe to say that Zeid had a way with women. Her gleaming oil, *Femininity* (1981), painted just a decade before the artist's passing, is a reminder that age could not diminish the profundity of female expression that she exuded in person and in her work in her golden years. Although its title is after a concept, the piece is anything but conceptual, showing a woman dolled up with all of the specific charms that would distinguish her as a guest to admire.

Zeid is an unstoppable heartbeat in the luring realm of posthumous exhibitions of Turkish art. While it is unfortunate of slight importance to prevailing concerns that *A Three-Character Play* will receive fewer visitors than expected due to the global pandemic, art-goers in Istanbul and abroad can be sure that Zeid will return, in full regalia, as always, a painter of universal spirit who treated herself and others as equal subjects on one, grand bon voyage of earthly creation.

March 29, 6:13 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Archipelago

The man had appeared earlier in his visions, a recurring hero of a protagonist who walks the line between reality and art in the mind of Antonio Cosentino. He is block-headed with oversized teeth and a stripe of baldness clean from his forehead to the back of his neck, like a wide ski trail, bordered by tufts of black hair that spike up behind his elephantine ears. But he is a dapper fellow, dressed in a casual white suit.

Where the figure had appeared before in Cosentino's paintings, he emerges fresh for *Jpeg Archipelago*, sculpted in wood as the piece, *August* (2020). The single button of his dress coat protrudes exactly parallel with the watch he wears on his left wrist. His unstained, bleached pants are hiked up above his ankles. His shoes are an elegant black and white. If he were animated, he might start tapping.

Instead, the curious chap stands, motionless, beside a raw block of wood, perhaps a relative of his origins; the substance from which he was cut. His expression ages somewhat in a large-scale charcoal piece on paper, *Haygaz* (2020), that serves as the centerpiece of the floor installation, in which the features of Cosentino's peculiar creative output are lit and form through neon displays of place names and from tin structures, such as *Aura Boat* (2020).

In the winter of 2018, Cosentino showed his 2013 tin sculpture, *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos*, at an alternative gallery called, Riverrun. The piece is a model ship adapting the Turkish author Sait Faik's short story of the same name, which he proceeded to tow through the streets of Istanbul as part of a video artwork, compelling witnesses to grasp the historic Grecian adventure that runs clear through the largest Turkish metropolis.

For his show, *Jpeg Archipelago*, Cosentino crafted a new ship out of a tin, *Aura Boat*. His choice of materials, namely tin, derives from his insatiable urban explorations throughout Istanbul, in which he has observed the versatility of the pliable metal as a container for all of the staples of Turkish cuisine, like oil, cheese, or olives, and after its recycling when filled with concrete to regulate parking or soil to cultivate garden plants.

*Jpeg Archipelago* revolves around a curious map, the title artwork drawn by Cosentino to reflect a most unprecedented adaptation of the known world. His lands and seas are a mashup of displaced cities, in which the history of borders is rewritten according to a geography all his own. The fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien come to mind in popular fiction, but Cosentino has not exactly drawn names from neologisms of philological invention.

London, for example, in *Jpeg Archipelago*, is, in Cosentino's cheeky brand of humor, part of the *Çiğ Köfte Adalar* (in Turkish, "Raw Meatball Islands"), a dot on an outlying territory. A local incarnation of the approach to recreating global history from the ground up was shown during the 16th Istanbul Biennial, with the work of Norman Daly, *The Civilization of Llhuros*. But whereas artists like Daly have copied the museological model, Cosentino is more artistic.

The installation of the sixteen artworks that make up *Jpeg Archipelago* is immersive, offering its seers a liminal region of fancy in which they are caught between two lands, namely, Aura, a more favorable destination compared to *Jpeg Archipelago*, which in Cosentino's map, is strewn with locations like *500 Decibel City*, or *Enverland*, etymological fabrications that might connote backward development, something akin to the Global North and South.

The polished flooring of Zilberman Gallery transforms into the still waters of a sea in the frame of Cosentino's exhibition. One artwork, a series of wood and ceramic sculptures titled, *August* (2020), figures a lady swimming up to her neck in the fictitious marine environment. Against the wall, paintings hang to represent the horizon. A canvas titled *Island* (2020) appears as from a night scene, capturing the ambiguity of both coming and going at once.

"I'm in the space, I feel the air surrounding me, it is a weird place. I don't know how I came here. But I'm here. I will stay here for some time," wrote Cosentino for a booklet accompanying the show, as his creative process often begins with a bout of creative writing before painting or sculpting for his multivalent installations and performances. "There is only one way out, to go to *Jpeg Archipelago*."

Cosentino is himself a traveler. His works, even in a gallery setting, are suffused with a sense of movement, driven by plot and character. To appreciate his installations brings about an experience that is both like reading a novel and watching a film, or a play. Visual cues are everywhere. The contemporary art medium through which he tells stories instigates active creative seeing, as he spreads the contagious inspiration that he catches everywhere he goes.

With the talent of a stage designer, a distinctive eye for lighting is one of the elements that make a Cosentino exhibition special. His vibrant, varicolored illuminations have animated Istanbul's many neighborhood galleries throughout the years, such as at Öktem Aykut in 2018, during the citywide *Large Meadow* summer exhibition organized by Riverrun. His tin sculptures have a Constructivist edge, melding street art, architectural modeling and city planning.

Despite works like, *Basketball Court* (2016), a relatively plain miniature reconstruction of its title subject, there are underlying subconscious metaphors and philosophical inquiries aplenty in *Jpeg Archipelago*. In the curatorial text prepared by Zilberman, a famous essay by Walter Benjamin is referenced, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production*, in which the immortalized critic identifies artistic quality within the zeitgeist of industrial modernism.

"In principle, a work of art has always been reproducible. Manmade artifacts could always be imitated by men," wrote Benjamin from the 1935 translation by educator Harry Zohn.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art.

Interestingly, when Benjamin uses the term “aura” to define the essence of an artwork, he intersects with Cosentino’s latest revitalization of creative production as present within a perennial state of *media res*, that is, of process-based becoming, symbolized by the recurrence of a visual personality who leaps from canvas to sculpture to the idea in the imagined field of the *Jpeg Archipelago* installation.

With his pithy turns of phrase, Benjamin’s essay remains timely in an age when pandemic isolation is forcing art further into mechanical digitization. “By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence,” he wrote of original artwork as a cultural fixture in the face of technology. “And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced.”

April 5, 10:05 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Brain

The interdisciplinary cultural historian Ben Lewis made his name as an art critic in London, eventually prophesying the downturn in contemporary art's boom and bust cycle with his 2009 documentary, *The Great Contemporary Art Bubble*. He critiqued the notion that capitalism and its marketing practices, which flagrantly doubled as process-based artwork, could assume an evergreen role in art history and more, that its name-brand cults of fame would eventually impair democratic free expression.

He carried themes related to the lack of regulation and transparency in the art world into the realm of big tech in 2013, exposing legal oversights and power vacuums in the dream that Google initiated to scan a universal, all-encompassing library. The Promethean venture had intellectual predecessors. H.G. Wells kicks off the ninety-minute film with a 1937 television announcement in which the author and futurist unveils his World Brain theory. Also the title of one of his essay collections, the World Brain idea predicted the bibliophilic lust of the internet.

But he was not the first. Ben Lewis outlines the breadth of human history's striving to consolidate all of its knowledge in his 2013 documentary, *Google and the World Brain*, retracing the footsteps of today's brightest computer engineers to the librarians of ancient Alexandria and the medieval copyists utilizing Gutenberg's moveable type. Yet, whether by the demolition order of Julius Caesar in Egypt or premodern European autocrats threatened by mass self-education, the power of free knowledge would be checked.

As the 2013 film shows, the adventure of Google's grandiose aspirations began in collaboration with some of the most voluminous and important libraries in the world, namely at the universities of Harvard in Cambridge and Bodleian in Oxford. Their millions of titles, preciously cataloged and preserved with world-class institutional rigor, were suddenly in the hands of a Silicon Valley company whose mission sought to bridge the largest sources of information with anyone anywhere. It was simply because they could do it faster and cheaper.

Not even halfway through *Google and the World Brain*, Lewis reveals the underbelly of the vastly ambitious project. He only hints at the legal impediments of a tech corporation acting like a crusading nongovernmental organization (NGO), continuing with many high-profile interviews, including with Amit Singhal, the former senior vice president of Google, as well as Ray Kurzweil, a Google employee, inventor and contemporary futurist. To a low buzz, the text appears against a black background before showing what is believed to be the only six seconds of Google's book scanning warehouses.

Individuated stations beam with brightly lit panels. A state-of-the-art camera is affixed within each setup, as workers sit side by side, placing books down as if they were on an assembly line at an industrial factory. In comparison to Harvard's earlier efforts to digitize its own collections, Sidney Verba, former director of the Harvard Library, told Lewis that the cost of scanning each

book was several hundred dollars. Google, in turn, could scan each volume for as little as thirty dollars, and offered to do it all for free.

The contrast between the business cultures at Harvard and the other world-famous libraries and their directorial teams that Lewis features could not have been more different than Google, where young and diverse engineers bounce around on vibrantly colored exercise balls and generally exude an air of freethinking hippiedom. One talking head is the dreadlocked, bearded Jaron Lanier, a founding father of virtual reality. “It’s not just traditional power-mongering because you’re making the world more efficient,” he said of Google’s position.

The buzz returns with the sound of an electric shock over dramatic music by sound designer Lucas Ariel Vallejos. Another text appears explaining how Google America refused to talk to Lewis about its Books project due to ongoing legal action, but that they could speak to Luis Collado, the head of Google Books for Spain and Portugal, who warmly professed to embrace the universalization of literary knowledge, especially outside the Anglo-Saxon world, for internet users.

Lewis continues to the storied library of Montserrat Abbey, founded in the eleventh century, which cooperated with Google to digitize 23,400 of its gilded hardcovers on spiritual practices and monastic life. When the interviewer asks Father Damia Roure, the library’s director, if it was fair that Google did not pay for any of the material, he is tongue-tied. It is a priceless moment in Lewis’s film, juxtaposing the outer layers of history and modernism along the fine lines of business and technology.

“Who wouldn’t want to have all of the world’s knowledge available to everyone on the planet?” asks Evgeny Morozov, an internet analyst from Belarus who established his sharp critiques of the virtual establishment with his 2011 book, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, and also as a contributor to *The New Republic* and visiting professor at Stanford and Georgetown.

The problem is that Google, as an intermediary in this process, has certain interests and has a certain agenda that’s not always transparent.

Robert Darnton, who served as director of the Harvard University Library during filming, speaks on camera frequently. He wears the distinctive savvy that his colleagues demonstrated by merely enabling Google Books to digitize public domain titles. A third of the way through Lewis’ film, issues of copyright unfold. A similar progression occurred recently when the National Emergency Library released its 1.4 million books and was met by authors who lambasted it for breaking copyright regulations, allowable only during a national crisis.

But when libraries are open to the public and business as normal reigns, the reality is not what Google had dreamed. Of the ten million books that Google scanned, six million of those were copyrighted, requiring the authors’ permissions to copy. These copyright permissions were not

given. Lewis employs the advantages of documentary filmmaking by focusing on specific information and accents it with interview-laden multimedia fireworks. By claiming to have acted under “fair use,” a term in American copyright law, Google defended itself.

What ensued after a one-hundred and twenty-five million dollar class action lawsuit filed by the Author’s Guild, which ultimately ruled in Google’s favor, led to what users of Google Books experience today. It is an unfinished complex of snippets and previews that do not provide full access to copies of books digitized, but do open the field for researchers to index and reference much of the material they scanned and published for the global, virtual public.

And as waves of isolation due to COVID-19 continue to force art lovers and media professionals indoors, such domains as Google Arts and Culture are transforming thousands of museums into remote viewing platforms.

“You can look at the internet as something divine,” said Kevin Kelly, co-founder of *Wired* magazine, whose radical views on the benefits of digitization are challenged throughout the film.

We eventually will come, I think, to revere some of our technological creations, like the internet to be almost like cathedrals of redwoods, to be as complicated and as beautiful as natural creations, and that, in a real sense, that there is more of God in a cellphone than there is in a tree frog because a cellphone is an additional layer of evolution over the natural frog.

April 12, 5:09 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Video

Suspense is a key ingredient in the work of Bill Viola. All seems normal for the first half of *The Raft* (2004), the opening piece of *Impermanence*, shown on Borusan Contemporary's second floor. Inside the exquisite waterfront building, which rises in shortening stacks of brick on a stone along with a spiking tower like a sandcastle, curator Kathleen Forde outlined an intriguing contiguity of video screenings.

In its remote form, through still images and texts by Google Arts and Culture, accompanied by the digital guide from Borusan Contemporary, the conceptual narrative fashioned out of Viola's oeuvre is essentially lost. In lieu of entering a physical space, in which the experience of the exhibition fans out along a course of works situated relative to their specific time, volume and proximity, online viewing segregates each work.

The itemization and disconnection of works into individuated media environments remove the overall curatorial project from its source. What is left are meanderings by which to become more familiar with the artist, and his output, but the grander purpose and trajectory of square meters for art in the city is severely diminished. As a metaphor, *The Raft* traumatizes a sociological pastiche into an equalizing state of emergency.

The diverse spectrum of the people, their clothes and skin, is reduced to a blast of blue and gray, as a high-pressure hose fills the frame, obscuring a woman's orange sundress, a man's purple shirt, into flailing shadows. As the rush of water subsides, the colors of the people reappear only darkened. Their mood changes from that of a benign crowd waiting for the metro into a climate of forced interdependence based on immediate need.

Reminiscent of the slow-motion videography of Israeli artist Yael Bartana, who has exhibited works at Dirimart in Istanbul, the prepared scenes that Viola enacts for the camera are imbued with unsuspecting gravity. In the dramatic sequence of *The Raft*, which could be said to have three acts, the last moments of the ten-minute piece are filled with memorable human interaction, face-to-face encounters of vulnerable desperation and mutual suffering.

Forde curated *The Raft* in a room of its own, sequestered away six other works on the second floor of Borusan Contemporary, where they are bunched together. The interior of one of Istanbul's more isolated arts institutions is austere, perfect for the dim atmosphere in which videos inspire cerebral curiosity. The piece, *Ancestors* (2012) bridges themes in *The Raft* with motifs that recur throughout *Impermanence*, namely, the meaning of interpersonal connection.

*Ancestors* is set in the steaming savannah, as the blurry, mirage-like equatorial landscape wavers with humidity. A pair emerge, by outer appearances male and female, dressed modernly. Instead of water as in *The Raft*, a light sandstorm picks up and obscures the field of vision. But the couple is undeterred. They approach with gaining intimacy, as the textile of their clothes become vivid.

Yet, before the facial expressions of the performers are visible, they walk offscreen in *Ancestors*. It seems a counter expression to the idea that the past, if it were embodied and personified, has any direct concern for the present. The complexities of experience and time have multivalent effects on identity and selfhood. If it is the case that Viola is making a statement about ancestral awareness, he is critiquing its tendencies to solipsism.

The feeling that the present moment is of utmost importance is embraced by both modernism and its interpretations of cultures that adhere to non-Western approaches to the passage of time. As a reflection of new technology or at least current paradigm shifts in the wake of late capitalist industrialization, video art is an apt medium. By universalizing all of human life as a simulacrum of social norms in his work, Viola is on the fringe of consciousness.

As a perspective, or functions of distance, both spatial and temporal, are necessary for critical observation, Viola performs the role of witness with a poignant, reflexive sensibility. Early in his career with *Chott el-Djerid* (1979), Viola formed his visual vocabulary, enacting varieties of remoteness in dialogue with isolated territories. Within austere, minimalist desert backgrounds inspired by the North African wilderness, figures dot and mark vast expanses.

As in *Ancestors*, Viola portrayed a pair of women walking to the lens in slow-motion over bleak earth for *The Encounter* (2012). They are dressed like spiritual wanderers and initially move along with a gap between them, until, without a moment's hesitation they turn inward and converge head-on. One of them is older, loosely dressed in a dark red ensemble, while the other, her younger companion, is in a lightly dyed dress.

The two women in *The Encounter* exchange an object, hold each other's hands firmly and stare into each other's eyes passionately. The subtext is to symbolize the transmission of experience between generations. But there is disquiet to their meeting, as the elder is drawn with concern. She has knowledge of the world, in which nothing is guaranteed, everything is malleable and every order of presumption changes like time.

*The New York Times* published an excerpt from *Three Women* (2008) by Viola, identifying him as a pioneer in video art. As part of his "Transfigurations" series, in which he charts the effect of time on a person's inner transformation, the curation at Borusan Contemporary references Sufi mystic Ibn al' Arabi. *Three Women* is an attempt to express the spiritual notion of the self as a shoreless ocean, or, in other words, as bearing an eternal nature.

That there is an apparent metamorphosis on the surface of what is perceivable to the faculties of sense, that is, to the body, which is, to artists and mystics alike, reason enough to prove that boundlessness and infinity are cruxes on which alterity, or difference, stands. Through a grainy film frame, a trio of women stands together, thinly clad. The lady in the center is tallest. She breaks from the pack, pushes through a waterfall and comes out in full color.



Viola adapts the history of the moving image in his video art. His tactful switching between color, and black-and-white, carefully directing offscreen eye-movement, the use of falling water and generally dramatizing human emotion both particularize and deepen wider appreciation for the craft of motion-picture photography and the many elements of theatrical and design work that it implies.

"I guess I have been interested in the spiritual side of things since I was very young. But the form it took was me, in a very quiet way, simply looking with great focus at the ordinary things around me that I found wondrous. I still do today," Viola said for a 2014 interview with *The Guardian*, in which he was celebrated as the Rembrandt of the video age. "I have my music and my tea, and I come up with ideas."

April 19, 5:59 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Alone

The film *Merkür* (from the Turkish for “Mercury”) refers to a fictive restaurant and spell of planetary dysphoria, when a neckless art world diva pronounces that she is suffering from a sudden bout of mercurial retrograde. The scene, meticulously crafted by directors Melis Balcı and Ege Okal, likely occurred in countless variations at the lobby cafe of Pera Museum, where a piano once owned by Maria Callas sets a prominently elitist tone.

The one-act animation begins with a young gallery assistant and aspiring artist kindly asking her boss if she might notice one of her original sculptures. The exchange is excruciating in its familiarity but adds a tinge of sympathy. It is the first of a barrage of anxious moments in which she is shunted. The young woman sits prim enduring total moral degradation before a trio of stereotypical proportions.

In a little over five minutes, *Merkür* overlaps a distended series of conversations that critique the art world and its highfalutin social norms. It is an apt point of reflection during a time when everyone in that field must scale back and reconsider new angles within the current saga of forced domesticity and social distancing. It might come as a windfall to those who were already inundated with the long-winded close talkers of art-speak logorrhea.

Instead of recognizing her as a potential talent, the people at the table merely pontificate to abandon, venting their egos peppered with Italian greetings, a tribute to their frequent appearances at staple art events like the Venice Biennial. But in *Merkür*, they revolve around a fair. A man at the table shows an art object he purchased for 7,000 (no currency), and the loud Anglophone who has just been bestowed with the title of director admonishes him.

The gallery director pipes up as a waiter slides a lobster under her face. She stretches to compliment the man, for curating what she identifies as an “elaborate” show by a sculptor whose works are spliced into the film as a bleakly minimalist column beside two spheres. It is clarified that the assistant is not an artist, as she foregoes speaking for herself. They continue to lionize the sculptor, named Daniel, for expressing “self-reflexivity” and his “sociopolitical identity.”

In her one attempt to express her opinion at the table, which is increasingly muddled by overlapping voices, she denounces the artist of their affections as “self-indulgent” and declares that “artists hide behind those propositions,” which is “not saying anything new.” Her cogent argument is quickly brushed aside by both her boss and their company, who abruptly prioritize the topic of their astrological signs.

To prevent a full-swing panic attack, the aspiring artist and gallery assistant excuses herself to the bathroom as the gossip swirls out of focus. The simple, though effective animation follows suit, as lines thin and figures warp. As the party leaves the restaurant, she is not invited to join them further into the evening. And surprisingly, she even compliments the man’s purchase from the art fair but is met with the silence of invisibility, voiceless and alone.

In the opening scene of *Oh Willy...*, a stop-motion animation film by Emma da Swaef and Marc James Roels, the protagonist's mother faints at home after serving herself a tray of refreshments. She is bare, her soft woolen frame a textural opposite to the glassware that shatters under her as she lumbers through the kitchen. The homey environment is juxtaposed with a sharp cliff, over which a goat plummets to the ground.

Willy, a rotund, balding chap, then comes to visit his bedridden mother in a closed, naturist community. There is a comic touch to the whole mood of the film, which is interspersed with flashbacks. Willy remembers growing up immersed in the harmonious hippiedom of his mother's alternative lifestyle. When she dies, he remains dressed at all of the appropriate funereal ceremonies in her memory.

The textile materials that define the world of *Oh Willy...* are remarkable in their accurate reflections of household goods and fixtures. The outdoor settings are equally inspired. It is with painstaking detail and a lush soundscape that the directors have created an authentic representation of human experience, with all of its magic and mystery intact. Without a word of dialogue, by contrasting beauty with the grotesque, *Oh Willy...* is an existentialist fantasy.

The recurring appearance of a goat prompts Willy to face his childhood, and a curious encounter with a mammoth-like creature brings him closer to his death. Beyond fear, he grows a beard and befriends the monster. The rousing music and sound design by Bram Meindersma, featuring the Wagner composition, *Vorspiel* and otherworldly weirdness of the film culminate in Willy's prodigal return to the nurturing of his mother in nature and the freedom of his origins.

As part of its curatorial text, Pera Museum explained that *Oh Willy...* is an animation that has the power to "transform inanimate things into feelings." In like fashion, the two-minute short by Alex Moy, titled, *Idle, Torrent*, explores "personal growth in tumultuous times," so as to convey the potential of stillness and discomfort to catalyze inner development. And truly, when the world must sit on its hands and stand behind closed doors, it is an opportune note.

Fading in to show a series of five sketches, *Idle, Torrent* is buoyed by its electronic soundscape by Bryan "The Bee" Natalio. At first uncolored lines wave slightly against rudimentary shapes, varying on motifs that resemble architectural blueprints or a floor plan. As new forms and vibrant hues issue forth, molding and merging to drops of water or off-key synthesizers, there is an overwhelming sense that transformation is immanent in all things.

Pera Museum's online film series "Home Alone" also includes strong, original works of live-action cinema. Like short stories, short films are a distinctive genre and form of storytelling, which director Ezgi Kaplan explores masterfully in her piece, *Fish Pond*. When four friends arrive at a summer house to spend a few days away from work in the city, they are met by an unexpected inhabitant.

The realism of *Fish Pond* is as unsettling as it is believable. But more, the mood that Kaplan creates is the art of her work. Frustrated by lost items, frustration over jobs and relationship drama, the quartet navigates the emptiness and ennui of getting away. But not even they realize their impacts on the remote terrain and new acquaintance, having previously determined to partake in a recreational diversion.

By the end of *Fish Pond*, the viewer has the privilege to see with an omnipotent eye, like an author who may survey their characters from all sides and assess their humanity. It is that agency of creative vision that Kaplan gives to her audience. The artist, like the storyteller, demonstrates empathy for the human condition by encompassing and even emphasizing personal faults in a world where experience is the result of conscious choices.

April 26, 4:36 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Move

Modern dance has the ineluctable capacity to universalize human expression. It is a form of art that, faithful to the body, evokes a standard of vision by which any individual may take center stage and transform ideas into physical movements. Raised by the discipline of ballet together with early twentieth-century performance art and avant-garde theater, modern dance has come to embody the ideals of modernism with superlative power and poise.

Immune to the anachronisms of language and media, the body, as a medium through which to create art, catapults its practitioners into the galvanizing forces of social change and artistic rebellion. In their insatiable search for newness through the otherwise limited coursing of the muscular skeleton, contemporary dancers are silent authors of a sagacious, prescient imagination of what it means, and how it feels, to create art amid present-day concerns.

One living luminary of the modern dance path, marked by scuffs on bare rehearsal room floors grimy with the tang of sweat and the pulse of quickening heartbeats, is Ohad Naharin, whose roundabout rise to the artistic directorship of Batsheva Dance Company, the flagship modern dance outfit in Israel, is the subject of a film by his compatriot Tomer Heymann. In a terse one hundred minutes, *Mr. Gaga* portrays a visionary, his methods and madneses.

The title of the documentary refers to the distinctive dance vocabulary that Naharin conceived out of the whims of his corporeal self-discovery. Everyone from the famous actress Natalie Portman to the dancer's partners attest to the magisterial potential hidden within its techniques and concepts. Having only begun his formal training at the age of twenty-two, Naharin's fate as a pioneer in the fully internationalist field of modern dance developed naturally.

Early reels of Naharin dancing modernly in the Israeli farming commune, which is known as kibbutz, where he was raised, depict a happy youth, in love with his verdant, fertile environment and supported wholeheartedly by a freewheeling mother and a sympathetic father. Like most artists of his day, it was not in Israel where he would cut his teeth in dance, but in New York City, which called him to its plethoras of bohemian flats and audition rooms.

Naharin approached modern dance as the antithesis of machoism. For choreographers in Manhattan who noticed him from the start, there was something inexplicably peerless about his light touch upon the ground, not to mention his personal command of his body in movement, appearing to commingle from within his core as the center around which gentle fans of winglike rushes sparked against the rough backdrops of expectation.

Soon, he was dancing with Martha Graham, the preeminent dance diva of America, whose signature opposition to ballet, defined by Herculean gravitational pulls to the ground, earned her top recognition from the White House, immortalizing her contribution to the canons of American art. It was an auspicious collaboration, but still Naharin was not satisfied as a dancer under the spell of superiors and their old-fashioned notions of choreography.

Yet, that did not keep him from hobnobbing and rubbing shoulders within the inner circles of New York's prestigious dance world. At a party one evening, he met Alvin Ailey's star, Mari Kajiwaru, whose beauty and talent captivated him. They married and established a working relationship that lasted until her untimely death in 2001, due to complications from cervical cancer.

Naharin and Kajiwaru had combined forces to change the course of modern dance expression in New York, and eventually the world. As his life partner, she quit her plum role as Ailey's assistant and onstage lead, and followed her heart, listening to Naharin as he conveyed what would become the Gaga style. In various incarnations, he led troupes of dancers under different company names, enlightening the art of creative movement in New York.

One day, he received a call. It was the Batsheva Dance Company, and they were offering him the directorial position. Kajiwaru loyally accompanied, but in private home videos that Heymann shows in his film, she is tearful, and visibly uncomfortable in Israel. She never changed her watch from New York time. Her loss devastated Naharin. He distilled his emotions into his work.

In the mentality that Naharin espouses as a culmination of his philosophical practice as a modern dance artist, he sees the interpretation of the dancer and the art of choreography merging toward the creation of a performance. Like a writer whose sheer grit endures the drafting and editorial processes, persistence is the essential ingredient for creativity in dance. And it is consummated behind closed doors, long before the curtain is pulled.

After the piece is written, or rehearsed to abandon under the watchful eye of a company's artistic director, everything is up to the dancers. The fleeting moment is primary. Before then, the discovery of art, or of modern dance, in the movements of the body is at the mercy of such perspicacious seers as Naharin, who drove his dancers to the edge of sanity, as he rendered his own body unfit to perform.

One night, following a show, he suffered nerve damage and would never fully recover. During his formative phase solely in the seat of artistic direction, Kajiwaru had been his best and serenest interpreter. Since dance itself is a genuinely nonverbal activity, gifts of intuition and complete submission are paramount. When she passed away, his dancers were all the more subject to his often unbearable flights of fancy.

Then, during a rehearsal for Batsheva Dance Company, he watched Eri Nakamura and could not pry his eyes from her artistry. She became his second wife, and together they had a daughter named Noga. Heymann produced his film, *Mr. Gaga* in 2015, three years before Naharin stepped down from his chair as artistic director at Batsheva Dance Company, relaying the laurels to Gili Navot.

In the final scene of *Mr. Gaga*, there is a particularly perceptive moment that reflects the peculiar genius of Heymann as a documentary filmmaker. It takes place during a rehearsal, when Noga, a beaming toddler, cries out for her mother. The exhausted lines of dancers disperse and one points at Nakamura, who Noga runs to with outstretched arms. Their baby then glides over to her father, but is unsatisfied and wails, interrupting everyone's work.

Nakamura storms out after her daughter, and Naharin is left behind, sitting in front of rows of his dancers, standing ready for his instruction. He clasps his chin, and lets an uncomfortable silence ring out into the tense ether. Finally, he okays the situation aloud, exasperated. It would appear that the man has assumed emotional responsibility for his life and learned to subsume that into his absolutely personal, body-positive creative visions.

May 3, 5:09 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Salt

The etymology of photography is roughly translated from Greek as writing with light. With the wisdom of the ancients, the Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado has trekked along the edges and heartlands of the globe in search of a voice that speaks through the rays of the sun. But it was only late in his career that he immersed himself in nature, having spent much of his life steeped in the social photography of work, war and migration.

That was after he returned to his country to find sources of healing in nature by reforesting Brazil, a towering achievement that by the end of the film had culminated in the planting of some 2.5 million trees in a formerly eroded territory. The project, Instituto Terra (or Earth Institute), is a demonstration of peace, justice and fraternity with all living things. For the old, battered photographer who had returned mournful from Rwanda, it restored his faith in humanity.

In many ways, his path in life came full circle with Instituto Terra. One of his earliest photography book projects, *Other Americas* (1986) prompted Salgado to return to his beloved origins in Latin America. At the time, he was in Paris with a wife and son, having pursued his initial studies in economics at the behest of his father, portrayed in the film as a decent elderly man walking the lands around his bucolic home where he raised, clothed and fed his children.

His education in the field of industry and its relationship to various markets and international relations would remain an important reference point for Salgado, who ultimately changed his professional focus, took up a camera and ventured out for months on end away from his young family to live with the people. He had a singular talent for showing how communities on the ground were vulnerable to extractive macroeconomics.

There are particularly effective moments of new filmmaking in *The Salt of the Earth* (2014) when depicting the relationship between the photographer and his subject. During his long stays in remote indigenous lands around the Andes mountains, for example, his face flows with shaggy facial hair. In his twilight years, when the film is being shot, all that is left of his youthful adventurer's mien are two wispy eyebrows.

When he is out on an expedition shooting a polar bear by the Arctic Circle on a remote island in Siberia, the documentarians portray him and the bear as two figments of a single imagination. Salgado contemplatively strokes his eyebrows like a forest hermit might his beard and dozes off. Meanwhile, outside, the once mighty and ferocious bear slumps down to nap. They are both looking for each other, it would seem, by the mysterious compulsions of nature.

Most of the film is essentially a slideshow of black-and-white stills. The work of Salgado alone speaks volumes. But like a double exposure, his face fades in and out, as his running commentary explains each passing frame in the soothing tones of his fluent French. They are each a passport to other worlds. Like his proud project, *Genesis* (2013), which launched him into environmental photography, his every photograph casts off presumption by sheer experience.



More than a photographer whose work is predicated on capturing a transitory flux of perception on the surface of things, Salgado entrains the mind to see visual reflection for its power to immortalize sights, or as William Blake poeticized in the opening lines of *Auguries of Innocence*, “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.”

For his *Genesis* project, which took a more positive spin on the world by celebrating earthly existence, Salgado captures a scintillating portrait of a sea turtle on the Galapagos Islands. The being, he says, is a wise one, an authority over the world. Its eyes, which filter the light of an eon, may have seen Darwin himself. And transitioning to the claws of a large iguana, Salgado sees the hand of an armored medieval knight. The creature is his cousin, he affirms.

There were times when, bowled over by the total tragedy of atrocities before him – from Rwandan refugees who fled into Congolese forests near Goma, never to be seen again, or the Bosnians who had been exiled from a completely European way of life by acts of genocide – Salgado put down his camera and mourned. In his last days, he walks through the forests that he helped regenerate with his wife Leila. He is, finally, as Sufis say, in the world but not of it.

May 3, 5:10 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Quotidian

In able hands, repetition aggregates into resonance. Music is a ready example of artwork based on the principles of rhythm, which implies regularity. The natural phenomenon is clearly exacted in the field of physical science, particularly accented by historic findings in relation to the definition of fact. London-based artist Georgie Nettell is a young critic of the postmodern zeitgeist, in which notions of truth and representation are constantly in question.

Her video, *Every lie has an audience* (2019), is a five-minute psychosomatic pastiche of personal disillusionment and its discontents, to adapt the 1930 book title of Freud's treatise on the unsuspecting foibles of civilization. Its collage-like course of images move from a glass of water filled before a vibrant green backdrop, to a man at home on his laptop watching the photos on his fridge fall in the middle of an earthquake.

Nettell is rocking the boat of social order, as she shakes the foundations over which contemporary society sways, beset by the dramas of artificial entropy. The demolition of a high-rise is spliced with footage of an aerial bombing, before a dismembered face of voices overlaps into a video call. The unsightly combination of images, set to a progressive rock song, effects a sense of repulsion.

*Every lie has an audience* could be interpreted as the tipping point where a person realizes they are caught in a vicious circle. As is known to students of psychology, such a volatile state may trigger either fight, flight or freeze. It could be argued that the feeling of redundancy, often digested as boredom in everyday consciousness, is not unlike having a recurring dream. Until it is confronted, laid bare and aired, it persists and may surge.

For her artist statement, Nettell referenced the Wigner's friend thought experiment, conceived by the theoretical quantum physicist Eugene Wigner in 1961. Wigner was a Hungarian-American mathematician who won the Nobel Prize for Physics two years after developing his groundbreaking scientific critique of measurement, observation and probability. In layman's terms, his work overturned the nature of human inquiry.

Wigner ultimately disproved the existence of objective fact. The implications of his research have parallels in the worlds of philosophy, literature, art and media. If facts do not exist, Wigner proposed, then the prevailing generation of physicists, artists and intellectuals are tasked with assessing the possibilities of their hypothetical return. But discussions about the mathematical conclusions of Wigner's friend also inferred that many truths were observable.

By watching *Every lie has an audience*, perception of the same content changes simply because time has passed, and in that way, so has the greater context. It begs curiosity regarding the emergence of installation art, as the wider institutional frames within which creativity is produced, publicized and exchanged increasingly come into focus. Nettell shows the planet spinning, doubly exposed against a sped-up analog clock. Everything restarts.

A trio of plants grow out of potted soil furnished with coins. The cognitive dissonance of sprouting leaves with money precedes imagistic metaphors of maturation. A first-person shot of an infant spilling its breakfast is juxtaposed with a teenager checking out with junk food at a convenience store. Adolescence strikes like a rooftop blast, or a live feed. The incessant cycle of creation and destruction is subject to interpretation.

Following a kindred curatorial line, the Istanbul Biennial film series chose to screen Mika Rottenberg's high-production video, *NoNoseKnows*. The twenty-plus-minute piece is replete with inspired photographic direction by David Hollander of Fourth Density Productions, as well as special effects engineer Katrin Altekamp from 4DEE Productions and the visual wizardry of Loïc de Lame, a digital imaging technician from Laryenco Production.

Like an early neorealist Italian filmmaker, Rottenberg cast real-life employees of AngePerle in Zhuji, Zhejiang province, China. The wordless tale opens with an emptiness so absolute it is chilling. Tall apartment buildings shadow irregular housing along a waterway. Then, the Caucasian actress Bunny Glamazon revs through on a three-wheeler. She is dressed as a middle-aged white-collar bureaucrat, heavily made up and coiffed.

Glamazon drives through the skyscraper development not far inland from Shanghai. She parks her recreational vehicle and excepting a lady with a surgical mask, does not see a soul commuting to the sterile building. Another woman glides past once inside. All seems relatively normal, but for a pair of feet sticking upside-down out of a plastic basket filled with pearls beneath her desk.

It is the first of a number of fantastical moments with which Rottenberg proceeds to relay her central concept. Glamazon has a superpower. She sneezes out ready-made meals. The interior of her workplace is as bland as the surrounding overcast atmosphere of especially banal Chinese housing projects. But, after the visual imagination of Rottenberg, the pale, discolored hallways are animated by bubbles floating in uniquely contiguous shapes.

Well-played snippets of editing add texture to the succinct anti-aesthetic of the video in which Glamazon squirts lotion onto her hands or sprays the soles of the mysterious feet that dangle upward by her ankles. Near the end of the piece, it is revealed that these floating parts of an invisible body belong to a worker on the other side of the reality divide. Underground, a Chinese woman revolves a fan contraption that causes Glamazon to sneeze over a bouquet.

There is an unsettling ambiance of abstraction, of absurdity, emphasized by split segments of clouded bubbles defying gravity in the unpeopled recesses of the manufactured setting, even with some indoor plants. The contrast between the reflex of sneezing as the satirical facade of an economic activity is stark against the portrayal of manual laborers meticulously needling through shellfish, cutting them open in basements to find pearls.

Along the assembly line of pearl-extractors, one woman keeps spinning a wooden wheel that fans Glamazon upstairs, whose work is to sit and sneeze. She piles plates of basic, home-cooked dishes of overcooked noodles and other humdrum Chinese fare. The analogy of the people's presence below her is inescapable, as a direct comment on the unjust oppression of workers whose lives and livelihoods depend on the thoughtless whims of impulse.

The more food that Glamazon sneezes into reality, the longer her nose gets. It is a trick of digital videography to lengthen her protruding face to such an extent. It would appear that her pixie dust also comes with a physical abnormality. Her longitudinal mien resembles that of Pinocchio, whose moral remains true through adulthood. Lies snowball, as Nettell might agree, until, as in *NoNoseKnows*, bubbles burst.

May 10, 3:53 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Hermits

An artist is a light in dark times. They are individual guides gifted with shamanic souls, able to lead society through the unknown. They go where the way is least clear. There are countless cultural references for the metaphor. When it is no longer permitted to go outside, it is important to remember that the inner worlds of creative vision and psychological health await like a clearing in the middle of a dense forest.

“I took the one less traveled,” Robert Frost poeticized of two paths that diverged in the New England woodlands. “When the going gets weird the weird turn pro,” Hunter S. Thompson famously quipped from the campaign trail. Or as the metaphysical philosopher Ken Wilber asserted in his foreword to Alex Grey’s 1998 book, *The Mission of Art*, artists are tasked with giving meaning to life, “by the subjective revelation of Spirit.”

Istanbul Modern, ever the forerunner of the institutional pack in Turkey’s arts sector, produced a video series spotlighting their feature artists, asking them the simplest of questions so as to appreciate the nonpareil significance of the artist’s life during these unsettling times, not only for the sake of art but as a model by which anyone might glean wisdom and solace. The transpersonal dimension of the artist’s life and practice facilitates alternative connectivities.

To begin, their project is aptly titled, *On the Trail of the Artists*, with respect to the incessant sense of motion that artists inspire, persistently creating, networking and scheming despite the tendency to lock up in the face of a widespread shutdown. Their online portal opens with an image of an artwork by the textile artist Güneş Terkol, whose embroidery on fabric, *Against the Current* (2013), is a testament to the uninhibited tenacity of novel pursuits.

Artists are essentially seers. Their identities as creators, as visionaries of potential worlds beyond the known, are born of a subconscious roiling that inevitably bursts forth and issues from their speech, as part of their look, and ultimately in their works. Terkol, whose art is an affirmation of female power, aligns her precious disciplines in textile crafts with a deeper sense of self than that which is generally prescribed by mainstream society.

So, when the rest recoil, the eccentrics emerge, all the more apparent. And they come into the spotlight prepared, trailed by a constant source of impetus, of purpose, suffused throughout their developing bodies of work. Terkol, as an example, has decided to remain isolated in her studio. She sat up beside a tall plant, a breezy window casting rays of sun against her loose-fitting blouse in late March, reflecting on her more withdrawn days.

Accustomed to being alone with her work, like most artists, Terkol dug into her closet to discern all of the pieces of fabric she had collected and was neglected until time bent and the world slowed. Now, she has had the time to reduce her grandiose assumptions and scale down to create smaller works and to return to unfinished pieces. One wall in her studio showed an organized assortment of colored sheets, with playful figures outlined in black.

The artwork of Terkol carries an element of circus performance, as musicians, animals and anthropomorphic beings juggle and balance across circular, dualistic motifs. It is childlike, personal and fantastic. Her studio is candid, a mishmash of clothing, effects and the occasional stunning piece of art, like calligraphic silhouettes in black clothes surfacing out of the delicate folds of hanging fabric.

Terkol uses color like a printer, adapting a sharp design sensibility, occasionally approaching pop art, or optical techniques, in her experiments with transparent, malleable mediums mixed with a recurrent focus on portraits of women and children. She is often bent over a sewing machine, surrounded by mounds of ephemera, collages reaching more than halfway up to the ceiling and strings of stray varicolored objects suspending out of view.

But she is not strict in her attention to the lines of productivity for which she is known and has since explored diversions, alternate means of expression, such as through music. When prior she would have left the studio guitar lying on the floor, she started to enroll in remote courses and even performed a brief interlude for Istanbul Modern, exercising an air, one note at a time.

For the last ten years, Terkol and her mother have filmed interviews to tell the story of their family's immigration. Finally, she has had time to go through their archives and return to editing the videos. She sits at her computer, its desk full and stacked from end to end, wearing a serious mien, peering into the screen for hints of details that may give life and form to the history that her folks endured along their own paths before she could follow hers in Istanbul.

And together with Terkol, the artists Irfan Önürmen and Taner Ceylan, whose works are part of Istanbul Modern's collections, welcomed *On the Trail of the Artists*, participating in their peculiar styles. Önürmen, for example, took up the camera himself. Foremost a painter, Önürmen specializes in washes of elegant portraiture in which layers of color and shadow that bleed through each other toward a postmodern return to formal expressionism.

Two hooded, masked figures square off in the middle of a tennis court. The weather seems cold on the vicarious side of the camera. From behind an interlocking, metal fence, a gloved pair of hands works to conceal half of the frame with a piece of paper, which whips loudly in the wind. The sky is dark, and the setting shifts to an interior, where the gloved onlooker is drawing on paper against a wall. He has the profile of Önürmen.

Rousing, cinematic music by Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays adds to the dramatic mood of the Istanbul Modern channel takeover by Önürmen, who then retreats into the sobering interior of a bookish studio, wherein a cat is sprawled over a recent draft. The music continues and spliced together with footage of COVID-19 victims, Önürmen cuts out the paper he had drawn on outside spying the mysterious duel.

With charcoal, paint and sheer critical thinking, he responds to the global pandemic with an aesthetic eye for distinctly, juxtaposed coloration, overlapping separate sheets of background sketches to begin a new piece. The video presents a gaze into the artist's process, a bewildering pastiche of action and craft. Not a word is spoken, but his work speaks volumes of the inexplicable, emotional catharsis of art in times of crisis.

On the other side of the personality spectrum, Ceylan explained his isolation with an honest, upright candor, from his desk, surrounded by cats that keep him company in lieu of measures that would restrict his friends and colleagues from visiting. He has had to develop a new everyday routine, which has been trying. His segment is a simple, conversational piece, accented by the anticipation of his upcoming show about his perennial love for Istanbul.

May 17, 8:06 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Unfinished

Not long after the Cuban Revolution, guerrilla leaders Fidel Castro and Che Guevara played a round of golf at one of the country's most prestigious country clubs. Outfitted in their characteristic military duds and chewing cigars, they smiled while putting to the sound of contradiction. To their burgeoning communist ideals, such an elitist institution would come under fire, compelling many from the moneyed classes of postcolonial Cubans to emigrate to the United States, where their deep pockets would remain at their hips.

But the fabled insurrectionists were not there to score par. They conceived the space as a plot on which to build what would become known as the National Art Schools of a new, utopian Cuba. However, it was a dream that – marred by the pitfalls of socialist development, particularly as concerns arts funding – has come to symbolize the post-revolutionary ambiance of Cuban society since the 1960s, its lack of stability, hypocrisies and fleeting moments of inspired tenacity, vainglorious fantasy and creative perpetuity.

The 2011 film, *Unfinished Spaces*, by Alysa Nahmias and Benjamin Murray, is an evocative historical portrayal of a country and its people. The institutionalization of Cuban art is a byzantine narrative rife with political intrigue. The documentary by Nahmias and Murray takes as its chief subjects the architects of the National Art Schools in Havana, whose star-crossed affair with liberal development in Cuba becomes poignant through their able lens, effectively situating architecture as a pivotal sector that may bridge or divide politics and art.

Led by Cuban national Ricardo Porro and Italian immigrants Roberto Gottardi and Vittorio Garatti, the men rose to the occasion under Castro's nascent government and within months drew blueprints and started constructing a variety of departments, from plastic arts to modern dance, ballet, theater and music. Footage from the building site shows workers on the ground answering to the architects as they revised on the spot and experimented with techniques that continue to impress the international community.

The designs concocted by Porro for Havana's National Art Schools are stretches of the bodily imagination. He had a penchant for feminine contours. The bulbous roofs that surfaced out of his drawings are only matched in their brazen protuberance by his sculpture of a halved, ripe papaya, which he set as part of a fountain center-stage within the complex. A leisurely sort, Porro interviews for *Unfinished Spaces* from a studio loft in Paris, surrounded by exotic art, and is even shown sensually sculpting his own work.

His fellow architect Selma Diaz, in contrast, appears for the camera in transit, somewhere on the street, presumably in Cuba, recounting the fated afternoon when a car rolled up beside her and out of its window popped the unmistakable visage of Castro, who then proceeded to ask as if extempore if she might design the National Art Schools he was planning to bankroll under the young, quixotic regime. Diaz tells the story a half-century later still with a bewildered expression, equally flattered and exasperated.



She showed up at a cocktail party in which Porro was then entertaining guests and asked him to be a part of the project. He agreed almost immediately, while not without a sense of incredulity, perhaps also a touch of suspicion. Together with Gottardi and Garatti, the trio embarked on a historical feat that, mixed with the volatility of the greater state of their nation, endures more as a testament to political and creative ambition than as the foundation of a pioneering arts education in Cuba.

In contrast to Porro's windfalls of luck and success in Paris as a Cuban emigre, Gottardi stayed in Cuba, and Garatti eventually resettled in Milan. The Italians appear to have aged worse. At one point Porro asserts that he was never a man to pick up arms for a cause, but that he was always willing to contribute to a national struggle, and to his beliefs with ideas. For most of the projects, their familiarity with the arts was not complete. While everyone knew of visual arts, modern dance, for example, was alien to them.

Porro took the lead on the buildings for dance because he was enamored with its bent to African folklore and for plastic arts, being a sculptor. Gottardi helmed the Dramatic Arts School, as a lover of theater. He is generally the more sober of the outfit, venting deliberate monologues for the documentarians in a dark studio, seemingly burdened by the weight of such debacles as befell him and his comrade architects in the upswing of midcentury Cuba.

Garatti, a wiry, nearly hunchbacked elderly Milano speaks with the air of a dreamer. Having left behind aspirations to become a dancer, he instead found contentment in his ability to build a ballet school. And with training in piano, his approach to the music department was equally advantageous. Much of the film follows him at home in Italy and returning to Cuba, where he walks the grounds of the derelict National Arts Schools amid countrified lands around Havana, unrelenting in his scheming optimism yet tempered by a fractured heart.

While the schools enjoyed a heyday of progressive student life, the project was soon overwhelmed by the Soviet political leanings of Castro and his communist allies. The otherwise visionary tradition of Cuban architecture that they were creating would be supplanted by such overly pragmatic industrial constructivism as prefabrication. And repulsively, Guevara himself was rallying against the enlightened milieu of youth that the National Art Schools fostered.

Although the doors of the National Art Schools were inclusive to people from across the Cuban countryside, no matter how rural and folk their communities and cultures, the politics of Soviet influence imposed an anti-intellectual stance. The architects of Cuba were split in two. Some were derogated as elite artists. And that discrimination became the order of business as usual at the offices of the Ministry of Construction under Castro's early government.

In their twilight years, Porro, Gottardi and Garatti reflect on the battles they won erecting unprecedented structures, which have been slated for preservation by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. But due to embargoes and other diplomatic issues, such support is problematic as

concerns Cuba's patrimony. Nahmias and Murray interview artists who experienced what writer and poet Hakim Bey might call a "temporary autonomous zone," in which young minds were given wings and poured their passions into a collective will for social betterment.

Toward the end of the film, the internationally renowned Cuban artist Kcho puts his arm around a hunching Garatti as they stroll around the empty, flooded quarters of the former music rooms at the National Art Schools. The grounds are overgrown, and in the windowless, concrete shell, they mount an art exhibition together, showing Garatti's architectural drawings with Kcho's visual work. It is characteristic of the resilience of a nation like Cuba, as with all human communities that, although fragmented by high-minded propensities, solidarity often surfaces.

May 24, 10:59 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Electrician

The man had dark circles under his eyes. He was said to play his compositions through a headset while he slept, so that in his dreams, he could continue to critique and create out of his otherworldly oeuvre. He appears to have been an affable sort, one uplifted by the levity of his soul, which traveled to cerebral planes where borders are no longer relevant. It was such an inclination that led him, a young boarder in Istanbul, to woo his married hostess and eventually whisk her away to New York City.

On the island of Manhattan, he could be seen wearing a plain black shirt which read, “Measly Mozart.” It was part of his eccentric persona, in which he felt confident enough to protest the peerless precedent of Amadeus so much so that he penned a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*, declaiming the status quo obsession with the Austrian prodigy. It was not the compositional prowess of the music that he was against, but the institutionalization of his constant centerstage legacy, in lieu of unsung and contemporary composers.

Mimaroğlu considered himself a composer, a contemporary composer at that, and keenly pursued an adequate education in the field. Turkey could not fulfill his early aspirations. So, together with his soulmate, Güngör, who speaks and appears throughout the film, Mimaroğlu knocked at the door of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. It was the 1970s, and the Turkish community in New York influenced major historic breakthroughs in American music, led by such industry heads as Ahmet Ertegun, one of the founders of Atlantic Records.

In collaboration with Atlantic Records, Mimaroğlu worked directly with such jazz giants as Charlie Mingus and Freddie Hubbard. The 1971 album, *Sing Me a Song of Songmy*, is a fusion of creative composition and soundscape by Hubbard and Mimaroğlu, the principal artists on the recording. It is an imposing pastiche of layered horns and voices, a blistering avant-garde amalgamation of two musical minds. It assumes the penchant that Mimaroğlu had for the media criticism of Marshall McLuhan, particularly the prescient idea of data overload.

Throughout the feature documentary, the music of Mimaroğlu plays to a fascinated trove of edited archival footage. Much of it was shot by the subject himself. To begin, Kökçeoğlu found an old reel where Mimaroğlu, ever the plump night hawk, introduces himself to the camera and then goes on to explain the socioeconomic incredulities of his survival as a contemporary composer of politicized electronic music. In his piece, *To Kill a Sunrise*, a voice narrates the mundane newspeak of assassinations and executions.

Together with grainy moving images of a bygone New York City, the music of Mimaroğlu is evocative against the bleary-eyed morning haze of smokestacks in contrast to the reflective gleam of skyscrapers. The timbre of his electronic instruments, mixed with the precise emotional grab of his compositions, has the power of painting a different mood over any image and experience with that of his pervasive aural ambiances. He provokes the unsettling sensibilities of the age in which he lived.

If the artist is said to reflect their times, to be a kind of mirror, a witness whose presence is heard and seen and felt, then the music of Mimaroglu presaged the prevailing milieu in which technology has arguably hijacked the creation of art and has come to define its existence from emergence to appreciation. The film by K k eođlu creatively adapts the compositions of Mimaroglu, essentially intertwining a new multimedia layer into his works, which are credited as the biographical narrative unfolds.

As a legendary jazz producer, and the owner of a record label, Finnadar, a subsidiary of Atlantic Records, Mimaroglu crusaded to bring avant-garde classical and electronic music to more listeners in America and throughout the world. But he was frustrated in his efforts by the fact that even working with such names as John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, there was simply no audience. His critiques of capitalism were stymied by his reliance on the deep pockets of Atlantic Records, specifically Nesuhi Erteg n, to fund his multivalent projects.

*La Ruche*, the second track on his 1976 album, is a force of strings commingling with noise elements that distort as they compel the composition into a feedback loop of waving, arrhythmic textures. It was the jazz composer Thelonious Monk who is attributed as saying that writing about music is like dancing about architecture. But, the music of Mimaroglu is like listening to architecture. Steps and slides of piano crescendo to crashes of frazzled bows and cacophonies of electronic bells and whistles.

One of the first and broadest online archives of avant-garde culture, Ubu.com, dedicates a page to Mimaroglu in its section on sound. Some thirty-two of his compositions are streamable above his obituary in *The New York Times*. He passed away in 2012. In the film, his life partner, G ng r, concludes the third section of the triangular documentary with remembrances of him. Her son, R stem resented their leaving him behind in Istanbul for New York. His relationship with Mimaroglu went as far as their intellectual conversations about cinema.

Much of the film shows Mimaroglu in his twilight years, embracing G ng r tightly, as she was ever his window into social worlds beyond the shadow realms of his inner pulsing. She is seen in the documentary, often prancing about the streets of Manhattan, delighting in every opportunity to grace the floor of parties and openings, screenings and sessions. She was also a businesswoman and leftwing activist. But toward the end of the film, she is shown in her Istanbul flat, aged, nostalgic for the love of her life that she lost in America.

In Turkey, Mimaroglu is often known for his writings as much as his music, which to most ears would likely remain unpalatable. His overflowing shreds of literary insight are sharp and perceptive, as he narrates himself throughout the film. He calls life in his contemporary age anachronistic, perhaps exemplified by its unrelenting glorification of eighteenth century Romanticism in music. His messages could well be spurned as bleak, for their transcendence of meaning in favor of more experimental, boundlessly creative paths to the reciprocal delights of experience.

In his defense, Mimaroglu was a keen observer of Western society, and his music is a testament to a modernist intelligence forged in the cultural milieu of midcentury Turkey and reinforced by the struggles of immigration in America. But beyond national belonging, or art form, his lifelong creativity in music, especially electronic music, serves as a beacon by which contemporaries might remember original alternatives in the history of popular culture. Mimaroglu, like an island castaway, heard another music distinct from the soundtrack of the current day.

May 30, 9:29 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Manmade

They are men of all sorts, colors, shapes and sizes. But they are men. And they are worried about their hair. They want to look good and will go to great lengths to get there, combing, cutting, coiffing, styling, spraying and shading. Zeyno Pekünlü's seventeen-plus-minute video collage *A Bathroom of One's Own* is a remix of YouTube videos, compiled to affect a common yearning that men exercise in private.

It begins with an open door leading out to a dark hallway. The camera is propped up over the mirror of a spartan lavatory. In walks a shirtless, burly black man. His hair is locked in thick strands. He has music playing in the background, a theme that runs throughout the video, expressing the personalities of the men portrayed. Whether he is a muscly athlete, pretty boy, skinny punk, or beatnik hipster, his hair must first be vigorously toweled down.

Adapting the title of Virginia Woolf's early book-length feminist essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Pekünlü devised a pointed satire on the hidden complexities of masculine gender and the contrived illusions of personalized self-image. While the men that she included within the frame of her visual scope vary dramatically in character, ethnicity and culture, they enact an almost identical series of cosmetic techniques so as to perfect their appearance to the last strand.

Woolf, a woman of the late 1920s, opened her literary discussion on female presence with the following lines: "Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation." This passage emerges as Woolf tells of a peculiar confrontation with a man out to redirect her, a woman, walking on turf.

The perceptive writing of Woolf, distinct for its penetration into the psychological and metaphysical depths of subjectivity, critiques the fixtures of gender roles, with a keen eye for the selfish, narcissism of the male ego. In a similar fashion, Pekünlü exposed the intimate underbelly of men. When alone with a mirror, male vanity is arguably as vulnerable as it is for women when it comes to cultivating positive, confident body consciousness.

Halil Altındere's 2014 short film *Angels of Hell* begins with an aerial shot of a cliffside sculpted into the shape of Atatürk's unmistakable visage. His beaming stare cuts through the gray marble of a mountain in İzmir. One of his famous sayings, "Peace at home, peace in the world" is inscribed in letters under his chin, which dwarfs the hillside hovels below. First declared as part of his campaigning in Anatolia in the spring of 1931, Atatürk coined the national maxim to express the diplomatic efforts of his Republican People's Party.

The actor Göksel Kaya bears a striking resemblance to Atatürk, so much so that Altındere, in the manner of his typical, mimetic satire, cast him to play a fictive version of the founding father of the Turkish Republic. Kaya, playing Atatürk, lays on the grass, suited in a pinstripe getup, crested with a white bowtie, which would have worked wonders during the interwar heyday of

the elder statesman. Above him stands the female bodybuilder Işıl Aktan draped in a Miss Turkey sash.

*Angels of Hell* is very much within the collective oeuvre of Altındere. In the fall of 2019, his solo show, *Abracadabra* at the Yapı Kredi Culture and Art Center revolved around wax figures of real personalities and archetypal characters peculiar to the local Turkish milieu, specifically from İstiklal Avenue and the building itself.

But with his uncanny sense of humor, Altındere chose Miraç Bayramoğlu as the star of his thirteen-plus-minute exploitation film. The one-hundred-and-eighteen-centimeters-tall actor is dressed to the nines in flashy white. He is an outlaw, handcuffed to a briefcase. Inside a warehouse, a motley crew faces him, and a rote action scene ensues. A man played by Cesur Yılmaz sports a wildly puffed and yellowed hairdo. If he were young, he could easily have stood as a segment in Pekünlü's film, *A Bathroom of One's Own*.

What is special about Pekünlü's film is that, as a woman, she turns her critical and creative attention to men when, behind closed doors and by themselves, they engage in acts of artificial beautification, of body alteration also shared by women. And the young men whose inner lives she candidly documents unadorned by high-quality filmmaking, with the common aesthetic of social media phone production, are each of them solitary. They assume a variety of cultural models, interestingly reflected by their music.

The look of a swinging rockabilly sound is defined by greasy, slick-backed hair, retro out of the 1950s, while the emo facade is a shock of jagged edges, as fragile as it is fierce. In men, as in women, hair asserts social belonging and identity. It can determine manliness in men, and femininity in women. Equally, it exhibits youth. There is a fleeting moment when an older man is shown in *A Bathroom of One's Own* that seems out of place, but it adds to the uncontrived mashup effect of the film, in contrast to the men's attempts to perfect their variegating looks.

Woolf dedicated much of the perennial intellectual work that went into *A Room of One's Own* to reflect on how frequently men portray women in their writing. She noted, in turn, that women do not write books about men. And examining snippets of observational prose written by men about women, Woolf's essay trained the mind of the modern reader, and by the unfading relevance of her output, the contemporary thinker, to consider the biased casuistry of the male gaze in literature.

“It seemed pure waste of time to consult all those gentlemen who specialize in woman and her effect on whatever it may be—politics, children, wages, morality—numerous and learned as they are. One might as well leave their books unopened,” Woolf wrote, with classic poise by the tip of her peerlessly acerbic pen. “He was not in my picture a man attractive to women. He was heavily built; he had a great jowl; to balance that he had very small eyes; he was very red in the face.”

The literary commentary of Woolf resounds in the video art of Pekünlü, not only by the eponymous title of her work, but as a window of contemplation through which to distinguish how men portray themselves and seek to become attractive, with how one woman has pictured them, objectively, existing within a world of their own fantastical, unworldly, but fully human imagination. Aktan, as Miss Turkey, resurrects a celluloid incarnation of Atatürk in Altındere's *Angels of Hell*. She is his accomplice in a microcosmic national shakedown.

June 8, 12:15 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Play

Turkish calligrapher Ömer Faruk Dere is bent low over a yellowed parchment. He traces a wisp of strokes over a cut of absorbent writing paper. In his masterful hands, Arabic script runs across the page like a visible gust, punctuated and accented with the flowing symbology of its silent echo in literate minds whose eyes have not succumbed to the usual, mundane course of language as prosaic. His calligraphic technique frees interpretation and renders meaning as sound into a historic order of visual poetry.

And under the capable lens of Ali Kazma, the angles by which to appreciate the traditional Islamic art of Dere come into captive focus. *Calligraphy* (2013) is from the artist's Resistance series, in which he portrays the human body as a function of grand ideas. Partway into the terse six-minute piece, Dere sharpens his writing utensil. It appears as a formidable craft on its own, complete with the disciplined precision of heightened perception required of skilled calligraphers. The fine incisions that Dere makes across and into the elegant piece of wood that serves as his ink pen conveys a microcosmic allegory for the perfectionism of human design. It is then replaced by assortments of calligraphic writing tools. Their ends vary in width, so as to effect degrees of boldness from the medieval Semitic alphabet. With his subtle editing, Kazma shows how varying types of paper are equally influential with respect to the intuitive, creative process by which Dere embodies and conjures supernatural expression.

In a similar light, the late Romanian artist Geta Bratescu posed drawing as a kind of performance art in her 2014 video, *The Line*. The physicality of the act of drafting becomes more visceral than cerebral in her portrayal. A pair of elderly hands holds a thick black marker, and over a white notepad, draws a series of impromptu experiments on the nature of form. Brătescu comments, her face offscreen, frequently disliking her attempts to follow the whims of her able hands, seduced as it were by the slight rushes of her bodily momentum.

At one point in *The Line*, Brătescu draws a human figure in profile. She is not afraid to expose her most often imperfect efforts to represent natural figures. Unlike the meticulous science of calligraphy, which generally adheres to its original aesthetic, the drawings of Bratescu evokes the process-based naivety of modernism. Her style is reminiscent of that practiced by Ayşe Erkmen, particularly her series, *Elephants, Penguins, Kiwis* (2018), which was part of *Whitish*, her solo show at Arter's inaugural opening.

The second edition of Arter's #playathome online video screening series features works by two artist duos. An untitled piece from 2006 by Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci questions the relationship between the person and their medium. Through the implications of their artwork, Cool and Balducci propose that there is greater reciprocity between the maker and their tools than normally perceived. Considering the idea that a tool might, from a certain angle, also use its handler, *Untitled* demonstrates the mutual viscosity of the creative act.

For a brief span of two and a half minutes, a woman hovers above a desk and dangles a piece of string over its sides. Her arms move parallel to its contours as she produces what could be described as three-dimensional drawings. The sketches appear as she shapes the simple white strand, forming fluid geometries that follow from her performative movements. Her body, then, mirrors the string, and not necessarily the other way around, as she looks on it with the curious, impromptu inspiration of her shared flexibility.

In a certain light, reflecting the dualism of their paired progenitors, *Untitled* is similar to the video by Diana Keller & Peter Rizmayer, titled *Still Life with Flowers* (2009). *Untitled* pictures a woman and a string, while *Still Life with Flowers* retraces the binary foundations of representational art with an inventive focus on the application of color. Keller and Rizmayer utilized the medium of video to produce a classical painting in reverse. Over five-plus minutes, the petals of a decorative bouquet leak out their hues and gray, in suit with the lifeless decor.

It could be said that the mother of dualities is, especially in visual terms, black and white, which shades the thirty-three-second silent video, *Crossing Yangpu Bridge* by Josef Bares. It is a recurring theme among video artists to portray movement, not only as a material phenomenon but also as a psychological condition. Along one of the longest bridges in the world, Bares videoed a critical depiction of urbanization, juxtaposing the fast and the slow as a meditation on the transitory quality of life in the city as a function of the infrastructural capacity for speed.

Another relative blip of temporal brevity is the twenty-two-second video, *Short Program* (2013) by the young Hungarian artist Kata Tranker. In her early twenties at the time of its production, the piece is an evocation of her artistic practice, animating her drawings with a flip-book featuring the image of a figure skater, which can be read as a play on the meaning of representational art. There is a captivating twofold motion at play, as hands on-screen thumb through the sapphire blue watercolors of a skater attempting an aerial spin, falling and rising.

At fourteen seconds shy of two minutes, the video, *Constituting an Island* (2014), is imbued with ample narrative concept, yet one as invisible as its subject. The artist, Iz Öztat was born eleven years after the death of the enigmatic author Zişan, who, as Arter confirms, appears to her in spirit and as a collaborative alter ego. Also exhibited at Arter's ongoing group show, *What Time Is It?* there is a simple and arresting beauty to *Constituting an Island*, which centers around a succession of canoes paddling in a circular formation against a rural, mountainous backdrop. Between the years of 1915 and 1927, the artist's apparently fabricated history shows that Zişan composed a short story titled, *Cezire-i Cennet/Cinnet*, which translates to *Island of Paradise/Possessed*. Öztat followed in the writer's footsteps, retracing his literary explorations to the last Ottoman territory in the Balkans, known as Ada Kaleh. But in 1968, after the construction of the Iron Gate hydroelectric plant, the island was submerged. Öztat drew attention to the loss of land and its history, imagined or otherwise, while proving that art and writing is innately revitalizing.

June 14, 7:48 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Jests

She matches. A blue-haired seventy-nine-year-old sporting a neckline adorned with a chain mesh resembling repurposed plastic clips, Ipek Duben sits atop the Juma building in Karaköy behind glass windows, comfortably adorned in a fuzzy, azure sweater. Hers is the art of a storied satirist, whimsical at heart and on the surface, but rough around the edges when bristled. Her visual venom is transmuted into the spatial forms of her plural artwork.

Far from self-conscious, yet entirely aware of her surroundings, she exercises her natural power to choose, as a woman, an artist and a human being, how to blend and how to stand out, not only through the colors of her clothing but also relative to her surroundings, both sociopolitical and natural-material. She does so by the recognition and creation of distance from reality through fantasy, situating creative perspective apart from imaginary beings, like angels and clowns.

A video plays on loop upon entering Pi Artworks, the top-floor art gallery at Juma, its austere, concrete space flooded with sunlight amid Istanbul's prime core real estate. Duben puckers up in front of a mirror as she smears on lipstick to accent her whitened, wigged face. She has no problem assuming the guise of a clown since it suits her light-hearted temperament, but when her latest works appear, her visionary sense of conceptual-aesthetic contrast comes into focus.

Under a sleek voiceover, her earnest voice rings out loud and clear to declaim the rise of disaster capitalism as a twin-headed mythological monster whose quartet of eyes inflames media veils of ignorance that obscure the direct experience of contemporary life and its tragedies. Her subjects are hurricanes, floods, the arctic ice melting, rising temperatures and sea levels, tsunamis, forest fires, volcanic explosions, aridity, famine, rising inequality and mass migrations.

When the artist recites the litany of newsworthy causes, they somehow sound fresh through her careful, poised articulation that has been screened and installed with curatorial tact across the gallery floor and along the otherwise crude walls of Pi Artworks. With the confidence of her education as a political science student at the University of Chicago in the mid-1960s, she has the experiential pull of a mind that has pulled at the roots of the global status quo.

And, utilizing the mediums of the postcard and the photograph, lightly embellishing them with wispy decorations of paint, she is ushering in a reevaluation of the prevailing world order by transforming one of the modern West's oldest traditions of expression and connection. Postcards are prototypical social media in that they picture and date individual and collective presence for the purposes of broadcast, often for personal and recreational devices.

The invisible minority of oligarchs sits enthroned beside the rest, restless and restive under the behemoth nodes of oppression that keep people confined while forcing them out. The fortress Europe has made itself into a postmodern promised land, enclosed with a barbed cage against which the darker and poorer strains of humanity cling and fall. Such scenes are in her work, *Moon 2* (2020), in which she juxtaposes illegal migration with the moon landing.

*Moon 1* (2020) is similarly coursed with visual insight into the quixotic gravity of earthling aspiration, which is never-ending in its approach to the heights. At one end, all 7.6 billion of the world's population would have a life equal to the descendants of Anglo-European colonizers, and on the other, worldly success is insufficient in a universe where undiscovered planets await colonization. Crouched on the crescent moon, witnessing Neil Armstrong's small step, Duben clowns around.

In 1976, Duben had switched from a career in politics in America to the world of art. That year, she earned a BFA in studio practice at the New York Studio School and planted roots in Soho, "when it was still Soho," she says with a wry, knowing grin. In 1994, with the rise Turkey's ruling party in Istanbul, she had a solo show in a storefront gallery in Taksim. She was one of the last local artists to expose herself so completely bare in a public cultural forum.

That early work appears in her piece, *Monument* (2020), a paean to the high arts of antiquity, particularly sculptural celebrations of the human body. She profiled herself from raised arms to straightened legs like an Egyptian goddess below an architectural frame out of a Pharaonic temple. In the same collage, she portrays the unspeakable vandalization of ancient masterpieces of marble, in honor of glorious femininity in its shapely wonder.

Preceded by well-earned international prestige, however modest a colorful personality she assumes, Duben is a careful, self-curating installation artist. *Angels and Clowns* is set within a baroque design of deep crimson wallpaper, textured with floral patterns like in a Victorian mansion. Two decorative, elegantly armed and gilded chairs are fixed in the corners of the gallery, as if out of the eighteenth century.

And draped over the floor, a Turkish rug is topped with an antique model turtle, something perhaps alluding to the masked balls of the old Ottoman palace, wherein moving candles lit the salons and ballrooms attached to the shells of living turtles, who it can be presumed must have walked into not a few blazing crinolined petticoats. The surroundings are from a time as baroque in its profusion as the cities of her portraiture: New York and Istanbul.

The seraphim of Hagia Sophia disrobe of their feathered shrouds, morph into cherubim and descend from the celestial ceiling of the mosque-cathedral-museum to light the city. First, one of the winged angelic infants touches the tip of the Maiden's Tower. It is part of Duben's piece, *Istanbul 1* (2020). Throughout the watery vistas of the vast metropolitan area, the heavenly cherubs fly, enlightening like the mahya art of stringed bulbs of words tied to minarets.

In her work *Istanbul 2* (2020), she quotes Orhan Veli, who wrote one of the most popular poems about Istanbul, *Istanbul'u Dinliyorum* (in English, *I am Listening to Istanbul*). And pasting out the legendary phrasing, word by word, from found fonts and other clippings, the notorious crowds of Istiklal Avenue march, shop-happy, within the interstices between an excerpt of the poem: "I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed / At first there is a gentle breeze ..."

Perhaps the most urgent, historical and difficult of Duben's works appears in her piece *Model 2* (2020). It is the second part of a series on the female body. One of the postcard-shaped additions is a newsflash. A young girl suffered mortal punishment of her family in the name of honor. The subject is an issue Duben tackled with her works, *LoveBook* and *LoveGame* (1998-2000).

With critical pieces in some of the highest-profile art collections in the world, including at the British Museum, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Istanbul Modern, the Vienna Museum and the Center for Book Arts in New York, Duben is a formidable presence in Istanbul for now and always. Her art, and her persona, however, are approachable, and even exciting, evoking the sensation of getting that postcard in the mail from far away only to learn the world has shrunk.

June 21, 2:51 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Early

Book four of *Leaves of Grass* (1855) by the nineteenth-century American poet Walt Whitman is titled, "Children of Adam" and contains some of the most brilliant, blazing lines of poetry ever written in the English language. "Was it doubted that those who corrupt their bodies conceal themselves?" Whitman poeticized in his nonpareil canto, "I Sing the Body Electric," like the bearded sage he was under his wide-brimmed hat, inking the literary ecology of the mind when the United States was riven by the twin evils of war and slavery.

Through that darkness which in many ways still casts its long, cold shadow, Whitman wrote verse empowered by the triumph of democracy as a liberation of the body. Adam, a metaphor for all of humankind as bound by kindred blood and monolithic ancestry, is just getting up as the earliest rays of sun peek over the mythical horizon of Eden. The final canto of book four in *Leaves of Grass* gleams with passages of the first-person narrative that approximate prose in their simple directness. Whitman's voice is like Adam, audible, approaching.

He implores, "Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body as I pass, / Be not afraid of my body." These evocations are rapturous embraces of body-positive, early modern humanism, faithful to the principles of naturalness as good when the world around the poet and his people, which included everybody, were struck with violent terms and acts of separation, of disembodiment. But the classic poem, epic and sprawling, the result of a lifetime of meditation and craft, is gently pressing its ultimate point, that like a touch, by a hand, conveys the feeling of physical abstraction.

It is a sensation executed by the purity of visual experience, yet no less visceral, in the paintings of Berke Doğanoglu. For the last five years, he has begun a promising oeuvre, culminating in sixteen paintings that reflect the curious phenomena of that known when the sight becomes felt, and losing its form to the eye assumes novel qualities under a hand. With close, intimate perspective, Doğanoglu frames parts of the body, blending figurative and impressionistic techniques, towards a representation of the body as a palpable abstraction.

There is a rainbow at the door and a young man is slowly, lazily waking up. A passerby stops at his window, fingering his prayer beads, glancing in before moving on. A pink bus rushes through the traffic outside under waving magnolias along the ancient inlet by the shorefront. It is hushed indoors, and heavenly cloud-hued, like the interior of a dream. Sparsely curated, *The Pill* is presenting Doğanoglu's paintings in the span of two exhibitions, so as to emphasize the space within the space, not only of the white cube gallery but of the painter's aesthetic approach.

The shoulder is a round place, and never resolves to a point. By the neck its sensitive zones are run through with a kind of vulnerability that triggers softness, give and trust. Under the cleft of its pit is a forbidden territory wherein the scent of the individual is stored and emits involuntary reactions of attraction and repulsion. Entering the cool, blank ether of *The Pill* for *As Adam*,

*Early in the Morning*, a pair of paintings hang from a wall, alone together. One pictures those merging parts of the body where the shoulder and back become the neck, hair and face. Not quite a profile, as the side of the face is left to a grayish monochrome background where the eye socket dips, before revealing the windows to the anonymous soul. What follows is more of an enigma, as the person is about-face, their back to the portraitist. In both works, Dođanođlu darkens patches of skin toward the upper neck. The color scheme is pale, visible strokes of light purple commingle with beige and yellow before a neat head of bluish-black hair. It is a traditional craft with a contemporary twist for its evasion of facial identity, eyeless and de-centered.

And coming to the second of three walls on which Dođanođlu's paintings hang at The Pill is a feminine figure, adorned in what might appear to be swimwear. In a clever technical play of form, Dođanođlu demonstrates his skill for that surrealistic approach to artistic precision, particularly found in painting, when the figurative is concretely in its imagery, yet is subject to interpretation, something akin to op-art, to the extent where multiple visions of the same work are equally visible. Whether painted from the back or front becomes less important than the essence of their flesh.

With the spectrum of an aurora borealis, Dođanođlu sets off into complete abstraction in a painting curated near the middle of the semicircular arrangement of canvases. A slow decrescendo of light purples blends like fog into a wash of warm blues and dark greens that are at once translucent and opaque. The effect is that of setting the time to predawn, when the sky is ripe for changes that appear supernatural, as from the visions of a dreamer on the verge of waking. And out of that haze of atmospheric blur, morning rests on the skin of the sleeper.

A person looking at and into the paintings of Dođanođlu may notice a parallel narrative at play between that portrayed, and the seer behind the scenes, what might be called the artist's gaze. Opposite the wall from the dedicated pair of paintings, a specific trio of works is conceivably the snapshots of an onlooker, a fellow sleeper whose still-tired eyes open to the sight of a body so intimate that at first, its parts blur into sketches of color and form, not unlike rough strokes of paint. Dođanođlu's paintings suggest that sensual perception is confined to subjective interpretation.

In a 2019 essay for *The Paris Review*, authors James Schuyler, Helen Frankenthaler and Douglas Dreishpoon discussed the mutual relationship between art and poetry. "Paintings, like poems, thrive on subjective associations," they wrote, in reference to a midcentury, international correspondence between practitioners of these kindred creative disciplines. Their common sources of inspiration and appreciation arguably derive from an experiential skepticism regarding the nature of objectivity, of materiality as an absolute.

Nearly two centuries apart since the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* went to press in 1855, Istanbul-based Dođanođlu, born in 1990, has adapted the ekphrastic lines of Whitman into a series of paintings that, through sight, prompt multiple meanings out of what it means to feel,

both as a metaphor for emotional response and as a synonym for the sense of touch. Dođanođlu asks seers passing through *The Pill*, how might a feeling be seen? In line with such gallery artists as Leyla Gediz and Mireille Blanc, his first solo show is a welcome answer to one of art's perennial questions.

June 29, 1:45 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Bridging

In 2008, when eleven outbreaks of bird flu, otherwise known as H5N1, spread across five countries from Indonesia to Egypt, the scientific community and political establishment were preparing for the worse. Experts forecast a global pandemic, and the U.S., with its notoriously broken health care system, was on high alert. Then the unexpected happened. The curve flattened, leading to stockpiles of tested vaccines and emergency equipment going unused.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 445 total deaths from bird flu since it first emerged in 2003, by May, COVID-19 had already claimed over 350,000 lives (and that number has topped well over 500,000 as I write this). The threats posed by bird flu have become the new normal. While the latter contagion had nowhere near the impact on public life of COVID-19, researchers awaited a deadlier blight than the 1918 flu pandemic, which killed an estimated fifty million people.

The chasm between the status quo understanding of the disease and the one backed up by medical professionals widens with gaping opacity in the event of worldwide pandemics. Health crises that test the limits of the international medical industry's capacity stoke superstition and ignorance, which breed fear of others. The seven-minute film, *The Interview*, by Işıl Eğrikavuk addresses these themes in the context of Iraqi-American relations.

Anmaar Abdul-Nabi has a thick Arabic accent. He sometimes stops himself in the middle of his sentences to ask for the right word in English. But in the medical field, he is a wunderkind at twenty-seven, answering the desperate call of the U.S. government to save their ailing country, as he is 99% sure of a cure. The 2008 video is based on a real Iraqi doctor named Anmaar Abdul-Nabi who the U.S. invited to help it face the bird flu epidemic of 2003.

*The Interview* features a pairing of interviews, both of which instill the mood of a tragic mockumentary. On the one hand, local TV reporter Anne Marie Berger speaks with Abdul-Nabi with the deadpan, serious tone of a newscaster on an official broadcast. In the other, the voice of artist Eğrikavuk is heard offscreen rehearsing with Abdul-Nabi in an informal setting for his televised appearance.

In both interviews, *The Interview* shifts the universal issue of pandemic awareness to that of Abdul-Nabi's immigration story. Abdul-Nabi himself discusses the regional origins of bird flu and its spread from Asia into the Middle East. The doctor is taken aback yet fields all questions with tactful gentility when asked to contextualize his displacement from war-torn Iraq to imperialistic America, whose conflict lingers like an open wound.

Eğrikavuk asks Abdul-Nabi how he feels as an Iraqi immigrant treating a caseload consisting mainly of immigrants from Latin America and the Middle East. His brow furrows like a scientist's might as their personal life is irrelevant to their research. With respect to the shared

human vulnerability to infectious diseases, Abdul-Nabi respectfully declines to partake in the politicized distraction.

The country-specific usage of “Spanish flu” to label the 1918 flu pandemic came as journalists were relatively freer to report on the disease in Spain under King Alfonso XIII. This has similarities to the geopolitical fear-mongering that brought about the perception of Asians as spreaders of SARS disease, exacerbated when U.S. President Donald Trump called COVID-19 the “Chinese virus,” further demonstrating his administration’s diplomatic failings with China.

In other words, what Eğrikavuk has shown in her piece, *The Interview*, with an utterly prescient focus that concerns the present moment, is that it is not enough for America, or the world, to have a cure for a virus. Berger, representing the media spin, stresses how the origins of the doctor called by the U.S. government to save Americans from the epidemic becomes unnecessarily political due to his being an Iraqi immigrant.

In the dark of a cave, metaphors of the human experience abound and have been the cornerstone of perennial teaching since time immemorial. From the modern psychology of the collective subconscious to the philosophy of Plato, the underground has signified the stark contrast between life’s mysteries and the limits of knowledge. Phillip Zach’s 2019 video *Double Mouthed: Yarımburgaz Cave* is a three-hour-long minimalist epic.

Located on the outskirts of Istanbul, Yarımburgaz Cave is an impressive discovery of unrivaled importance for archaeologists, as its geological formations and human remains span over one million years. *Double Mouthed* is a two-part video installation marked by Zach's subtle way of enclosing literary analysis and pop culture into his exploration of prehistory’s overlap with the contemporary, evoking the cognitive dissonance of a graffitied petroglyph.

By appreciating such a broad sample of earthly development, Zach’s art forwards a keen eye for irrational phenomena as a prime mover in the historical process. As with the adage that the first casualty in war is truth, so too when a pandemic arises, reason takes a backseat to allow social cohesion and business, as usual, to go on despite the new primacy of mortality that renders every social interaction potentially deadly.

From the cavernous depths to cityscape panoramas of Istanbul, Zach shifts his focus to professor Mehmet Özdoğan, an archaeologist whose sense of humor is as clear and fresh as his conversational grasp of millennia of a prehistoric civilization and its portrayal inside Yarımburgaz. Premodern artists drew scenes of their ancient world on the cave walls, including details of ships that identify the time period as no earlier than 5,000 years ago.

In a twist of tone, Özdoğan is lightly sarcastic when speaking of his contemporaries, the youngest generation of artists, to add visual evidence of human life to the interior of Yarımburgaz. They have painted over an invaluable source of archeological knowledge and of

humanity's tangible heritage. But smiling, Özdoğan also sees it positively. "It stimulated other talented artists of our time period to continue painting on the walls," he said.

Zach's depiction of Yarımburgaz reveals a massive subterranean lair. Oscillating and spinning under the bulbous, smooth stone that takes on amorphous, water-like shapes, Zach fishes in the unlit reaches as stalactites drip slowly in time to the coursing of geological eons. His breath is audible, as we witness a spelunker, lone and wayward, before returning to Earth's surface. He is tracing the coexistence and merging of eras.

Professor Mihriban Özbaşaran reminisced about the "double-mouthed" nature of joining excavations from 1988 to 1990 at Yarımburgaz after Özdoğan discovered Paleolithic layers beneath a small Byzantine chapel in the upper chamber of the cave. Özbaşaran's professor, Güven Arsebük of Istanbul University, left much of the excavation for the next generation, only to lose all progress made to illegal excavators. Now, nowhere in the cave is as it was.

July 6, 1:00 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Summer

Is there rhyme or reason to the daedal salmagundi of artworks that, in the spirit of Jackson Pollock, will cover the cubistic interior of Art On for the hot season? Like the drips and smears of an action painter splattering to abandon, the current exhibition, *Eternal Summer*, is a grab bag group show of figments of objects floating as on the eccentric stream of its intuitive, illogical curation. What might be gleaned out of its variegating motifs, its pairings and arrangements of rectangular hangings and sculptural textures?

To each their own, as the Romans said, doing as they did, whether being or not being. And isn't that art's primary question? To express one's sheer existence, to live an examined life, from such inquisitive states of mind the creative impetus unfolds, ensorcelling those who would otherwise not know where to find it. Like magic, blown out into the air, ungraspable, by a single poof of fairy dust, the muse materializes into a burst of countless particles, spells and divinations of a paranormal, visual order.

Up, up and away, eyes wander toward the clouds. A vast, rolling saga of cumuli blanket the azure empyrean like the beginning of a long, deliberate story, the voice of the teller pausing frequently to let the spacious air ring with meaning. It is simultaneously the backdrop and foreground of an acrylic painting by Uluç Ali Kılıç, entitled, *Tollgates* (2013), for its outline of turnstiles seemingly cut out of a slice of everyone's daily commute in Istanbul. The effect of contrasting quotidian mechanics with a common view of the sky is pacifying and elevating.

Placed on the upper floor, wherefrom the displays of Art On descend, *Tollgates* is immersed in an effulgent, urban environment, as glass-filtered natural light pours in from over the horizon of the Golden Horn. Into the hill-crested storefront facade, sights and simulacra of originality and invention peak, trained through self-guided spheres of color and form. But as the ancient adage of Buddhist philosophy popularly translates: "Form is emptiness and emptiness is form." With that knowledge, Kılıç has imparted a familiar, yet transcendent vision.

Innumerable as the clouds, digital artist Erdal Inci coursed the human figure on repeat, cast like a glitch harmonic, spread over a post-industrial cityscape. In the Diasec print, a bleak intersection of streets is populated by an unnatural breed of technological being. By his twist of wit, Inci titled his piece after an insect, *Centipedes* (2015), for it resembles the segmented invertebrate covering ground space like the trill of a singer. The piece has an unsettling quality. After the dust of the apocalypse has settled, Inci watches anthropomorphic mutants emerge. The tangled aesthetic of *Centipedes* has magically surreal urban motifs, like *Tollgates*, but in terms of pure visual vocabulary, they are akin to a piece situated just above and besides these two works. *Ram Antler* (2019) by Olgu Ülkenciler might seem crude and even amateurish in its design, craft and coloration compared to the scintillating *Tollgates*, or the technological wizardry of *Centipedes*, but the oil on canvas is surprising in its poise, instilling a sense of painterly conviction steeped in the nodes of cyberspace and the subconscious.

On entering Art On, the curation of the upper right-hand corner of the gallery is pieced together with a random, but captivating sensibility. Besides the work by Kılıç, minor works by Mithat Şen and Burcu Erden grace the most compact section of wall in the bijou interior. Yet, it is arguably where the eye is least liable to focus and apprehend a sight where the most exciting potential for discovery lies. Şen is an abstract sculptor of an order all his own. It is questionable whether it is even possible to pigeonhole his plastic art of mounted parchment. Lobster-shaped, his third edition from the series, *Istif IV* (2019) hangs cloud-like above *Tollgates*, as a clawed sea creature, flying purple into the wilderness of the non-representational imagination. And white as the bursts of moisture that tickle the atmosphere in puffs and billows, Erden's paper abstraction, *Untitled* (2020) is a hint of a whim leading to the visceral power of her sculptural oeuvre, mostly etched out of blocks of wood. Another untitled work by her, though in her main, arboreal medium, conveys her ingenious fantasy of humanoid configurations, embodied in raw timber, blacked at the edges of her proto-human effigies.

A hard light casts its beaming rays across Erden's untitled wooden relief. The piece was part of her debut solo show, *Calling for the Mass*, in 2019 at Art On. Most of the works from that show grew up out of solid, raw blocks of wood, as her simian creations reached upward and into the ether out of some deep-rooted artistic spirituality, shedding the clunky embodiment of earthly form to behold the emptiness at work throughout nature and the cosmos.

And beside Erden's sylvan venture, the collective Oddviz produced a more metropolitan introspection. As innovators in the burgeoning field of virtual installation, the three-man team at Oddviz continue to craft photogrammetric works that delve into the urbanized landscape with a keen mind for points of transition, dissolution and imposition. They effectively salvage the consciousness of city-dwellers and repackage it in tight-knit packages of visual dissonance. *Kadıköy I* (2018) is a melange of neighborhood nostalgia, featuring an Ottoman fountain, graffitied post office box, bygone street decorations and a much-missed junk car. Oddviz has mastered the use of artificial light, a staple technique for artists of any age. Yet, their hyperreal technologically-infused collagist adaptations of street memory are akin in certain respects to the neon-shimmering experiments of Ahmet Elhan. His series from 2018, *Notes from the Underground* is an eclectic surge of multicolored flares, an overwhelming escalation of strobes and blurs. Its curation beside Oddviz and Erden further explores the chaos of disparate, clashing elements with Sencer Vardarman's *Church* (2017).

One distinctively striking piece in *Eternal Summer* is a fine art print, *The Scene* (2018) by Begüm Yamanlar. Its careful schemes of shadow and light evoke the emptiness of city life, its abandoned zones, unpeopled and as futuristic as it is indicative of the forgotten past. As for standalone sculpture, the elegant works of Işıl Kapu, in pink travertine and marble elevate the urbanity of the show's overall atmosphere to the realm of cultural sophistication, as from the prehistoric motifs of Erden, to an optimistic vision of eternity reminiscent of the ancient world.

July 12, 6:28 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Screen

In the space that remoteness creates, potential expanses breed unexpected orders of being and interconnection. That is the crux of the current online exhibition of video art at Mixer, slated for remote access through the summer. Every Turkish artist who contributed work to the show also invited a foreign artist to equally participate. National identity is arguably more flexible and more liable to dissolve entirely in cyberspace, particularly when curated with a universal sensibility, conveying art that strikes at the roots of human consciousness.

If technological gadgetry essentially functions as extensions of the five senses, the eye beams foremost. It might be said that computers began from touch, something like how an eyeless insect feels. But, from the bulky modules of the 1950s to the popularly commercialized desktop in the 1980s, the visual emerged. What followed were sounds. While generally unable to transmit tastes and scents, the imagination takes over where sight, sound and touch end. It could be said that touch computing is still ambiguous, however, as it is a one-way street.

Since the advent of touchscreen capabilities, computers have become inundated with streams of information regarding the nature of human touch. How and what people touch is increasingly translated into the digital imprint of history when it comes to onscreen visibility. And yet, the metaphysical realm of notional computation remains a mystery. In other words, that which is touched is simultaneously transcendent, and ultimately, unknown. Such is the vision of Balkan Karışman, whose piece, *through the slit* (2020) renders touching digital.

Despite its sway to big tech and advertising, the young, naive world of digitization has received an information flood of biblical proportions for at least the last decade. Against the whirlpool riptides of its torrents and downpours, individuals, in solitude or collectivized, while distanced from each other, face off with the internet, a perplexing web of attractors as confounding as it is user-friendly. Performance artist Can Gökdoğan, like a martial arts student out of *The Matrix*, pervades the transformative, impalpable sphere of virtual reality in his work, *through the slit*.

Over an unsettling and transporting sonic ambiance by Burak Dirgen, *through the slit* is almost narrative in its capture of the impossible fight and the inevitable confrontation with synthetic digital experience. Gökdoğan lunges and leaps from one side of the perceptual divide to where the real meets the virtual. For all of its overt tendencies, the piece works its way into cerebral definition with a subtle harmony, playing with themes of ontological dissonance and the mutations of selfhood when navigating liminal worlds between sense and self.

The work of French digital artist Mathieu Le Sourd, best known as Maotik, makes a welcome appearance at *Art on Screen*, Mixer's summer dedication to the medium of video. Taking off from the idea that technology is practically all-pervasive, Maotik focused on climate for his piece, *erratic weather* (2020). The curatorial statement of *Art on Screen* references Nam June Paik, one of the founding fathers of digital art, who, in the 1970s, dreamed of a world where digital experience would be a part of daily life.

Paik was prescient from a distance but helped to catalyze his self-fulfilling prophecy with his piece, *TV Garden* (1974-1977), a historical escapade featuring cultural icons like dancer Merce Cunningham and poet Allen Ginsberg. That preceded his 1984 broadcast, *Good morning Mr. Orwell*, which reached twenty-five million viewers around the world, sowing the seeds for the concept of viral content. Paik remains part of Istanbul's art landscape not only through its computer portals but also in Arter's collections, and elsewhere.

Utilizing prime technological aesthetics, *erratic weather* begins with a faded shimmer of beautiful, multicolored bands of light that spiral in and out of shapes resembling that of typhoons, hurricanes and cyclones. To the hypnotic, waving rhythms of Maarten Vos, whose sound composition is as radical and visionary as Maotik's graphics, the sight and sound of the piece merge with chaotic harmony. When the image blurs, the glitch effect turns the aesthetic sour and in that unraveling, the digital world reveals its very real, inhuman soul.

In the vein of Paik, considering the conveniently transmittable medium of digital art, Maotik ventured into the field of social cause with his comment on climate change, placing an accent on the nature of change, and problems of anthropocentric environmental awareness. But other artists in the show, such as Can Büyükberber have taken the opportunity to use computer technology as a means to explore traditional crafts. Three digital sculptures from Büyükberber's series, *Multiverse* (2017), relay the transcendental poetry of virtual creation.

Returning to a planetary context, while Büyükberber did adapt the human form, Canadian digital artist Trudy Elmore's piece, *2020* (2020) is an aquatic exploration of disorder suspended in a submerged seascape. The slowness of the animation assumes an ambient, otherworldly sublimity as the virtual camera angles its way through a floating nether realm of dual-colored bodies, spindly plants, wayward schools of fish, and reflective globes. To the sound of a cathartic, synthesized pulse, Elmore tapped into a kind of digital spirituality.

With an illustrator's sensibility, showing six human figures framed on repeat within antique, conceivably orientalist arches, postcard-like, Meltem Şahin presented *sketches with + for + from ai* (2020). Its color scheme is painterly, five of the six persons doused in chalky pinks and purples reminiscent of tie-dye, or impressionist oils revived to sport an '80s look. They are all obsessed, somehow, with their heads, precisely putting them back on, and letting them fall, whether their own or a model.

*Sketches with + for + from ai* is a work linked in many ways to that of Büyükberber, as it quotes sculptural aesthetics, yet is original in its accommodation of historical attributes visualized with a pop, internet accessibility. Set to eerie music, the forty-four-second video has a ghostly quality, as a postmodern meditation on the abstraction of death and the immortality and immortalizing potential of computer intelligence. Through her inventive approach to the repetitious, mechanization of the digital, Şahin humanizes technology by making art out of it.

Baltimore-based designer George Wylesol surveys the notion of reality, its cold and tireless persistence, with a revival of early computer illustration. Three of his GIF-like pieces animate the everyday, working modus operandi of the majority who lead lives defined by various degrees of indifference, boredom and alarm. On the other end of the spectrum, experimentalist Ozan Türkkan mines endless fascination with fractals and algorithms toward an interactive, socially transformative vision of video art in the breathtaking *fractal body #3* (2019).

July 19, 6:06 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Cocoon

The towers are empty, and so is the old ammunition factory. But its Byzantine aesthetic, with thin rectangular maroon slabs fixed along sandy arches, is refreshed with an aerated grandeur. Between faded imperial glory and glimmering residential envy, it appears there is always space for new art by the Sea of Marmara, even along its sparser coastlines. As the dust settles about Fişekhane, a restoration project befitting a time-traveling movie set, the gallery Art On lent its vibrant roster of artists to Contemporary Istanbul for the show, *Spinning the Cocoon*.

Inside, there are collectors, critics, dealers and artists. Behind them, a stunning assemblage of painting, sculpture, photography and varying mixed media works are suspended along the storied, renovated walls of the historic war room. Instead of looking at the works of art, however, everyone stares. They have stopped in their tracks. No one sips a drink. Cameras do not flash. There is complete silence. What ensues, nightmarish, is the thought of a seer who, alone, spies the soul, the metaphor, the passion of creation.

Most immediate are the cloud-like parchment works of Mithat Şen, whose “İstif” series entices with abstract forms colored vibrantly like a naturalist drop in the ocean of modernism. As the bubbles of cold libations tossed and turned, swashing over tongues that wagged and waved into the eyeless tundra of society, there emerged *Two Angels* (2019), enlightening the bleak ambiance, mobbed by the heady commotion of personality talk. The oil on canvas by Onur Mansız is a scintillating, painterly vision of garden mysticism. With a perfectionist touch, the autumn leaves of a forest interior come into lucid focus by the hands of Mansız, whose craft exudes masterful discipline. And centered within the pile of leaves, shot through with lichens and evergreens, are a pair of gleaming, porcelain figurines. The use of white paint is almost hyperreal as the texture of the polished, artificial objects is juxtaposed with the rustic earthiness of the plant matter surrounding them. The piece has a gravitational pull, a transcendent calling that reflects the process of artistic creativity.

Flanking the oils of Mansız are two untitled works by wood sculptor Burcu Erden, from her 2019 solo show, *Calling for the Mass*, at Art On. In contrast to the light, atmospheric poise of Mansız, Erden’s capture of naturalism is rough, edgy, hard and raw. Anthropomorphic figures rise from solid blocks, headless and animal. They have a more contemporary cousin in a canvas of acrylic and spray paint by Olcay Kuş, *Untitled* (2016), portraying a stencil-like suit-and-tie workaday sort out for a fist-pumping romp.

The curation, a collaborative effort by Art On and Contemporary Istanbul, placed two other works by Kuş across from those of Mansız and Erden. From 2018, they are mixed media exercises in the drawing of hands, an otherwise gentle part of the body rendered mad with visceral intensity by its street art aesthetic, and saturated candy pinks and electric blues. Clapsed like a waiter taking an order, and draped with a semi-abstract serving towel, Kuş's hands exhibit the power to give, and to take, beside another gripping, crumpled paper.

One of the most jolting and massive artists in *Spinning the Cocoon* is Evren Sungur, whose large-scale canvas of charcoal and oil on paper, *The Train of Madness IV* (2018) bears the strength of a civilization and its visual motifs, spanning some imagined epic of muralist-inspired surreality. From the seat of a wooden cart, from which a leafless trunk extends upward and branches out with cartoonish and skeletal arms, an entourage of humanoids and beasts are caught in a rare moment of stillness. *The Train of Madness IV* has an impressive sweep of depth. Its plurality of perspective draws perception inward. Theatrical in its scenography, the charcoal drawings are reminiscent of unfinished artworks, popular during the Renaissance, and there is a late medieval, Rabelasian feel to its potpourri of unseemly characters. About the monochromatic majority, steely, lidless eyes are ever-open, flagged right angles of jaundiced and flushed hues. And from the arboreal core, white lines mock that of an architectural blueprint, giving definition and concept to the bewilderingly complex pastiche.

Such shows as *Spinning the Cocoon* offer exclusive peeks into the art world and its less visible, emerging spheres of influence. The unexpected presence of fine art prints by art photographer Elif Kahveci spiked the party punch with a healthy dose of ambient naivety. Her works are curious reappraisals of the faculty of sight and its potential to pierce the veil of landscape. Whether of mountains or sea, her lens glides carefully over that fluctuating realm of mythopoetic wonder in which the planet overwhelms human life. Kahveci's photographs definitively express the very meaning of the environment as that which surrounds and envelops, but not for mere aesthetic pleasure. Her piece, set in the verdant hills of some exotic locale, pictures a single grave immersed in vegetal overgrowth. There is an unmistakable sense of the post-apocalyptic through her sight, which she frames so that viewers can look through and experience, simultaneously, her unique vantage point. Her second piece is of a beach, unpopulated yet marked with empty chairs. The sky looms large above all.

Toward an even more nihilist bent, Olgu Ülkenciler's 2017 mixed media piece, *Fathers and Sons (Turgenyev)*, invokes a literary quandary over the dissolution of the self in light of human nature, and how biological reproduction might translate into a philosophy of worldly disillusionment. With a visual palette similar in certain respects of color and form to the graffiti-like strokes of Kuş, and with a bold visionary scope such as that which Sungur conveys, Ülkenciler's work ingathers the feeling of filial identity and its transmutations of coalescence.

Finally, returning to the urban field out of which *Spinning the Cocoon* spins are representations of Istanbul, particularly in a strong work by the three-man artist collective, Oddviz, whose photogrammetric virtual installation *Kadıköy I* (2018) amalgamates fragments and icons from Istanbul's trendiest, pro-youth Anatolian neighborhood. A twist of current commentary from the show's curators, perchance, might be found in one work on display by Ahmet Elhan, *Places – Hagia Sophia 6* (2011), a unique C-print. Elhan, a craftsman of light and its repetition, has created a symphonic geometry of interior design after the religious site.

July 26, 8:14 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Danube

In the nineteenth century, travelers embarking from Budapest to Istanbul felt at one point that they were traversing an imaginary line where the West became the East. The border was more psychological than physical. For centuries, Hungary was thought of as one of the gateways through which the self-styled Orientalist passed on their way to adventure. Prior to air travel, the crowded ports of international waterways served as the main points of passage between countries, histories and peoples.

The Danube, at the height of seafaring exploration, enjoyed singular prestige for its linking Eastern Europe with the Balkans, and thus the frontiers of civilizational identity and geopolitical perspective. Along its winding course, history was constantly forged and rewritten, personalities immortalized and alliances made. A slew of distinct intercultural associations emerged on all sides, founded on economic exchanges during the heyday of the steamship industry.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, newly built railways came to the fore in the Balkans as a worthy competitor to the shipping sector. The Orient Express famously passed through Budapest from Vienna before reaching Belgrade. Many passengers were used to going partway on their eastward routes by boat. When the Hungarian Eastern Maritime Company was established in 1898, it not only linked businessmen and tourists between the ports of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires but also served diplomatic purposes.

Nearly two hundred years after Hungarian national hero, Ferenc Rakoczi, died in Tekirdağ, the ashes of the exiled revolutionary who defied Habsburg rule were returned to Hungary. The case of Rakoczi was only one example of how the commercial use of waters connecting Hungary to Turkey strengthened their respective historical ties.

With visual accompaniment to texts in Turkish, Hungarian and English relating the story of the Hungarian Eastern Maritime Company and Rakoczi, one of Istanbul's most bustling piers showcases a hectic array of rowboats and steamers. It has the appearance of the quayside at Beşiktaş, but the black-and-white scenes appear much more crowded than even the worst of workdays in our present milieu. Fez-sporting dock workers amble about beside countless wooden barrels and stacks of covered sacks, heavy with the silence of a bygone world.

Emboldened by the ambiance of a floating platform on which commuter ferries transport urbanites and globetrotters up and down the Bosphorus, across the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara, the simple second-floor exhibition, titled, *Closer to the East, from Hungary to Turkey* is the work of Hungarian curator Balazs Tinku-Szathmary. The Hungarian Culture Center mounted an intriguing series of antique images, briefing footsore wanderers and cultural workers.

Six photos from the *Donau Album* of Amand Helm, named after the spelling of the Danube in German, begins with a view of the storied canal portion of the region-wide river as it winds its

way through Vienna. A second scene leaps over to Belgrade, where the city's section of Zemun is fog-cast, stretching along the banks of the wide stream with its clusters of homes, their steeply pitched roofs indicating snowy winters and regular rainfall in the riparian ecology. Below, in the Romanian cities of Orsova, or Turnu-Severin, the riverside expanses are emptier.

On another placard, mounted with a painter's easel, a sprawling view of Pest-Buda, better known to Anglophone ears as the Hungarian capital of Budapest, shows the grand city's towering church steeples, its hilltop mansions, and picturesque residential neighborhoods. While monochrome, the character of the place comes through, transporting with certain focus past its suspension bridges and beyond, where the Danube flows to the renown of its name overlooking the southern confluence of Bosphorus.

A portrait of the Hungarian writer and journalist Bela Toth profiles the fez-capped wordsmith in a velvet three-piece suit, mustachioed to a wisp and bespectacled just five years before his death in 1907. His travel writing made a somewhat dark impression of the way from Hungary to Romania and beyond. In one instance, he wrote in his book, *Magyar Rarities*, published in 1899, of "a frightful and magnificent apocalyptic sight" following an incursion of armed forces near the Romanian village of Ocna Sibiu. There is not much exposition on the significance of Toth, however, to the Danube or its Hungarian commerce in relation to that of Istanbul. Meanwhile, Anglophones will be hard-pressed to find primary material in translation by Toth himself. But such are the tantalizing qualities of exhibitions like *Closer to the East, from Hungary to Turkey*, by presenting snippets of archival curiosities from which to research and discover otherwise unknowable findings buried in layers of cultural specificity.

Oftentimes, a sidelong dive into an obscure window to the past may reveal surprisingly fresh takes on current-day issues. While the idea of quarantine might seem unnatural to most people alive today, its historic precedents are manifold. Before 1857, with the end of the Crimean War, Hungary mandated personal lockdowns for anyone coming from Istanbul. There were two separate periods of confinement, five days for epidemic-free periods and ten for when Istanbul was enduring the plague. An inspired trio of engravings is displayed as part of the pedestrian show to help visualize what it was like to step into an officiated, premodern quarantine zone in Zemun, enclosed by an armed guard, a rickety fence and the formidable Danube shoreline.

Perhaps the most exciting entry in the Tinku-Szathmary curation is a diverse set of material illustrating the life of Ödön Szechenyi, also known as the "Fire Pasha." The thin, bearded man of Hungarian extraction is responsible for having founded the Istanbul fire brigade, thereby becoming the first Christian to receive the rank of pasha by the Ottoman sultan. His example is integral to the history of Hungarian-Turkish relations. Eastern European in spirit, his memory is joined to his musical compositions, including the *Shipping Union Polka* (1866).

August 3, 6:31 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Temporal

When an artist experiments with the notion of autonomy, they begin to approach a social dimension in which their personal expression becomes transpersonal, leaping beyond the confines of their specific individuality into the collective sphere of interpretation, consensus and history. What began as a way to keep records, to quantify possession, quickly evolved into the contiguities of linguistic symbolism.

Even in the most humdrum of daily conversation, the abstract intonations of emotive speech contrast with the complexities of logic as two competing representative forms by which to convey, affirm and share mutual definitions of reality. They are both complementary and conflicting subconscious motivations that aim to preserve certain norms of social behavior. But the artist, by profession, oversteps these boundaries, as a silent witness and enfant terrible.

Under the influence of her own peculiar order of creative chaos, of methodical madness and imaginary engineering, Inci Eviner is a keen draftsman with a mind for the image as a vessel of meaning. Hers is an unprecedented ideographic vocabulary, otherworldly yet uncannily urbane. She is playing a cosmopolitan sport in which disciplined practitioners of the fine arts taunt masked dilettantes weary of esoteric sensibilities and impractical inventions.

*What Remains, What Returns and Implications* is not without a sense of humor, however opaque in its dark, oblique evasions and flirtations with familiarity. The works of Eviner demonstrate a liberated hand, one that, since her birth in 1956, has resisted the cold weights of industrial pressure and economic obligation.

Her visual quotation of German-American philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt's face invokes social commentary on the nature of observation and its dissolution before the irrationality of absolutism. The piece, of ink, charcoal pencil and silkscreen on paper, titled, *An Escape Plan for Hannah Arendt* (2020), replicates the philosopher's enlightened, youthful visage as a motif smudged against encroaching wild animals and bleak landscapes.

Of the ten artworks on display at Galeri Nev Istanbul for *What Remains, What Returns and Implications*, Eviner made all of them in 2020 and they are all framed to a width of two hundred and thirty centimeters and between forty centimeters to fifty centimeters high. The broad, narrow scope within which her drawings are angled provoke a particular perceptive mode, one that by its spatial consistency and it being parallel to the longitudinal plane, implies virtual distance.

Suspended at average eye-level, Eviner's multimedia drawings are textual, as mostly Turkish, also English, phrases climb upward and along the abstract and figurative impressions and their often dissonant mergence with the blank, white background. Mostly dichromatic, according to the greyscale of ink and charcoal as its blacks are absorbed and fade sideways across the silkscreen-on-paper medium, Eviner relays a muted, yet no less diverse plurality.

In one piece, *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, Eviner explores her signature erudite intrigues by quoting from the classical play of *Antigone*, "I do. I deny nothing." The author, Sophocles, wrote the lines in the fifth century B.C., as the lead protagonist's response to Creon, the ruler of Thebes. It is arguably a pivotal dramatic moment in the play when Antigone confesses to burying her brother, Polynices, who perished on the wrong side of civil war.

Eviner spelled out the dialogue of Sophocles, in handwritten English, under a pair of full-body human sketches. The couple embraces tightly, surrounded by a confounding maelstrom of stray lines, an upturned printed face and semi-representational landscapes that appear to be either a person reclining, a slope of distant hills, or both. And beside them, a rectangular field of splotches about a smear adds subjective, dimensional depth.

*The Epistle of Forgiveness* is, like every work by Eviner at *What Remains*, *What Returns and Implications*, an agglomeration of unfinished details, flashy effects and partly, though upturned or sideways references to prehistory juxtaposed against more familiar historical themes. In one example, a fashion drawing of a slim-legged feminine stance is overrun from the waist up with a thought-bubble inhabited by a strange, mammalian creature.

It is obvious that the works of Eviner for *What Remains*, *What Returns and Implications* are not easily conveyed in words, even if they also are within the works themselves. But it is because of her encompassing vision, one that stretches consciousness of perception to the edges of the knowable, which makes her art so difficult to capture and relay through any other medium. To attempt to do so is wildly presumptuous.

It could be argued that the relationship between words and images diverges in the literality of symbolic sounds. When a sequence of phrases is rearranged, its meanings change in the same way that alternating perspectives might reveal entirely new visual experiences of the same artwork. Limiting her colors to grayscale and occasional flits of red or flashes of gold, Eviner wisely minimized the degree of variation to the cold, hard multiplicity of forms alone.

By placing geometric decoration alongside action splatter, such as in her piece *Elephant* (2020) Eviner triggers an order of cognitive dissonance that is at once unsettling, and bewildering, while also retaining a certain aesthetic appeal. There is a sense of movement in her works that approximates sonic, bodily tension, a kind of compositional or choreographic arrangement of the tableau, conceivably intended for experimental performers to interpret.

The experiential potency of Eviner's drawings is that they decentralize the act of seeing from that of the seer. They are counterintuitive, filled with spontaneity and the magic that turns life into stories, memories and art. Eviner has sought to draw a meandering line to distinguish, however indirectly, the difference between clarity and visibility. Because something can be seen does not mean it can be understood.

Eviner uses a tantalizing phrase, "images unconsidered," to project her intentions behind making her artwork. Those footsore wanderers and hardy art lovers curious and fortunate enough to spend a few quiet moments with *What Remains, What Returns and Implications* inside the silent, ethereal white cube interior of Galeri Nev Istanbul will come out with their doors of perception slightly more cleansed, so to speak, to paraphrase Aldous Huxley.

*What Remains, What Returns and Implications* is bracing in its originality of focus on that which is seeable across the contemporary horizon of worldly affairs, like the ongoing perils of commercial whaling. Reminiscent of the surrealist painting by Hieronymus Bosch, Eviner explores elements of fantasy, as in the piece, *Kuleli Military High School Tunnels and the Monster of Çengelköy* (2020).

August 9, 8:08 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Bearable

In 1942, the U.K. was hard-pressed for a sense of humor. Even a subject as dry and obscure as a commentary on historical artifacts of scales from around the world, including animal-shaped metallic weights from the gilded valleys of Ancient Egypt or similarly practical instruments of expensive clear quartz mined in Brazil, prompted the British-accented commentator of *Weights and Measures Issue Title Weight and Sea* (1942) to make remarks about the vintage film's female model.

By the end of the three-minute segment, pro-war propaganda ensued in the form of a joke. Despite its ill-timed cheekiness, the anti-Nazi, anti-Communist context of the film's production is indicative of the pervasiveness of politics into the spheres of culture and domesticity, particularly during wartime. For all of its trimmings, the topic itself facilitates the communication of enduring experiential, functional knowledge, such as which household containers are best for weighing and measuring.

In the following decade, the color film entered the popular domain, and it became an apt vehicle for the realistic portrayal of people and material in daily life. Informative, short films like, *Weights and Measures* (1956) hold not only sensual perception to account, but also relay a narrative of an investigation into the illicit phenomena of tipped scales. A pair of plainclothes midcentury men from the Weights and Measures Department of London are inspecting a solicitor at Lewisham Market and they are scrupulous.

The narrator explains how seemingly humble workers of grocery stands in the open-air markets of the U.K. were oftentimes tricksters and would be frequently caught in snap checks, cautioned, fined, or imprisoned by snooping authorities. Such standards as "a baker's dozen" were kept governmentally uniform, so as to record and identify economic progress and decline. This realization emphasizes the importance of physical quantification, its accuracy, like clockwork, as an integral, underlying principle of social order.

The idea of "short measure" and the homogeneity of glasses, bags and boxes of all kinds for serving and transporting goods between consumers and retailers are almost subconsciously reinforced by the humdrum exchange of quotidian commercial activity from factories and highways to restaurants and shops. The precision of weights and measures and the vulnerability of their instruments and receptacles is in direct correlation to the wear of time and history, with its technological paradigm shifts.

Frank Hill is bent and crooked, laboring with a meticulous devotion to his handmade millefiori paperweights. He is dressed like a worker, in a simple, striped beige collared shirt, rolled up to his elbows. Behind him, the industrial space glows, dungeon-like, unnatural, but beautiful for the varicolored products of the lonely, old man's toil. Even in 1956, when the segment on Hill was filmed at the Whitefriars Glassworks in Wealdstone, London, the narration called his efforts "a fragile, but comparatively dead art."



It can only be speculated how alive Hill's handiwork might be today. A Google search is not promising. *Paperweights* (1956) is a pithy, two-minute film which deftly follows his humble subject as he manufactures, with rudimentary tools and mostly by hand, the decorative but entirely practical paperweight objects. Hill is essentially a practitioner of the glassmaking craft, soft art so to speak, which is said to have originated in France, circa 1845. In London, however, Hill represented an unbroken, multigenerational lineage of glassmakers.

Of greater historical interest, Whitefriars Glassworks is an atelier workshop of rustic, traditional smithery. When Hill stood before the cameras in 1956, its furnaces had been burning continuously since 1680, when the building was a monastery. Over carnivalesque music typical of outmoded British reels from the archives of the twentieth century, Hill utilized unusual methods to perfect the making of his gleaming, translucent works. A wet newspaper puts the finishing touch on ornaments for mundane offices or even goblets for King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II.

In chronological order, the archaic film selection by Pera Museum for its series, "Measure of Human," leaps to 1958 with a segment called, *Modern Scales*. The overly colorful voice of the narrator sounds like an attempt to make up for its relatively sterile theme, surveying the ultra-precise means of analog analysis which form the basis for systems of barter, exchange and trade. A bespectacled laboratory scientist scrutinizes minutiae of levers and pulleys to accurately measure dust particles to a ten-thousandth of a gram.

Uplifting orchestral music is set to the painstaking efforts of a crime detective carefully sifting through ash taken from the clothing of a suspect. Within that frame, the exact weight of evidence can be used to trace its origins. Landing a punchline at the end of *Modern Scales*, the old-fashioned British productions come to their conclusion, and Pera Museum's series, "Measure of Human" then follows more contemporary perspectives, from 2013 to 2019, with a three-part documentary and two artist interpretations of standardized, physical calculation.

In Katherine Behar's seven-minute video, *Cloud Profiles: Weightless Measures*, a reclining human figure is opaque, grey as granite, and turns, still, within a computer imaging field. Alongside and permeating the contorted body is a more digital incarnation, aura-like, paralleling its anatomical shape. An eerily ambient soundscape plays, fuzzy and vibrating with unearthly tones. As a third semi-abstract physique glides through the virtual space, like a sunken ship falling in slow-motion to the seafloor, its surface has a rusty texture.

Across the screen comes the presences of what Pera Museum's curatorial statement referred to as "an amorphous, innocuous nonentity." These bewildering imaginary objects inhabit a shadow-realm where perception is suspended in a kind of anti-gravity environment, essentially an expression of the pseudo-physicality of data, which is to be understood as the latest manifestation of weights and measures. The piece first appeared at Pera Museum in 2016 as part of Katherine Behar's solo show, *Data Entry*.

The music to Nicola Lorini's video, *For All the Time, for All the Sad Stones*, bears a fuller dimensionality. Its metal-born melodies are suffused with sweeping string sections and electronica infusions of escalating scalar modes. The piece came from sculptural installation, set in the fall of 2019, including sand, silicone, and deer bones. Like Behar, Lorini also mused on the idea of the internet as a numerical domain which subsumes and transcends material existence into bewildering cerebral weightlessness, with aberrant effects on time and history.

August 16, 1:37 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Forum

It is a simple, understated curation, but in that way familiar and comforting, almost like stepping into the family home for an informal teatime roundtable with relatives and neighbors, poring over black-and-white photographs to reminisce about times at once older, and somehow younger.

Ahmet Müderrisoğlu is in mid-pose. He could be playing air guitar, clenching one fist at his hip as he raises his left hand to the sky under the punk mop locks that cover his entire face. The other seven in the picture appear as out of an interior winter scene in Istanbul among the heady airs of its mid-1990s art world heyday.

Müderrisoğlu is an abstract painter with a pop edge, employing vibrant, artificial colors as if out of an advertising scheme for the uncultured swayed by flashes of instantly gratifying, common images on repeat, however, bent out of shape. In the photo on display at the Forum in Salt Beyoğlu, from the opening night of a show at Devlet Han, he stands next to a stoic, thick-jacketed and long-haired İsmet Doğan.

Doğan is as emotionless as he seems in more recent profiles, where he is often standing beside his mixed media canvases of semi-abstract naturalist representationalism. He is the only one in the photo not smiling or even animated. He must be taking himself very seriously. But the others do not. A youthful, smiling Ali Akay places his hand on the shoulder of a warmly grinning Gülsün Karamustafa. Akay had just become an associate professor and would go on to head the Mimar Sinan University's sociology department. Through her practices as an artist and filmmaker, Karamustafa also tackled social themes, such as gender and ethnicity.

Müşerref Zeytinoğlu laid down on her side, and with her head in her hand, looked up and smiled for the camera. Her research has focused on the skin and the body as the head of the fashion and textile design department at Yeditepe University in Istanbul where she teaches courses on drawing techniques and color analysis. Her blonde hair matched with the casual sweater worn by Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, a slightly rotund sort who tilted his head upward for the lens like a Shakespearian actor about to pontificate on the muses of the universe. Alptekin had a global mind for the eccentrically hyperreal nexus of installation art and aesthetic philosophies.

With a cool sideways stance, the prolific ceramicist and theorist Emre Zeytinoğlu wraps his palm around a glass and eyes his colleagues, all in the prime of their lives, as their lives are frozen for a passing moment in which they may or may not have been reflecting on the nature of time and its ephemerality. Zeytinoğlu and Akay had just published a book together a year prior to the photograph, *A Deconstruction of the Urinal* (1994), in reference to the classic found object installation by Marcel Duchamp.

And interestingly, the book that Zeytinoğlu and Akay published was released for the opening of Istanbul's Uart Art Gallery, where photographer and installation artist Bülent Şangar had his first exhibition. Şangar stood as the rightmost persona in the group photo at the Forum in the

entranceway foyer of Salt Beyoğlu. While relatively unimportant in passing, the image is a treasure trove of references to the early career collaborative spirit that would define life in the contemporary art world when Istanbul's culture sector was bubbling with the unprecedented and as yet unparalleled invention.

Another trio of photographs features a stern, middle-aged Cengiz Çekil in all three. Either with his hands behind his back, or crossed in front of him, he is stone-faced and still, but maintains a solid posture. Standing with colleagues for the 1995 exhibition of Canan Beykal at Şantiye Gallery in Izmir, he is mustachioed, wearing a grey suit jacket with downtrodden eyes that might indicate some exhausted tragedy. It is coincidental to note that the Salt has just released a major book publication surveying the extent of Çekil's oeuvre. The book, titled *Cengiz Çekil: 21.08.1945-10.11.2015*, was edited by Salt co-founder Vasıf Kortun, who also contributed to the volume's original texts. Inside its pages, interviews include Vahap Avşar, who appears in the Forum photo series in the same frame as Çekil. Avşar can also be seen joined by artist and professor Selim Bırsel, who remains active at such galleries as Riverrun and Öktem Aykut. Avşar has a brighter countenance in his stance, as he dons a white getup, and under close-cropped hair appears as a young and determined man of the cultural scene. By the time of the photo in 1995, Avşar had become a critical artist in Turkey and moved to New York.

Canan Beykal makes another welcome appearance in the next series of three photos at the Forum, which chronicle the 1993 exhibition, *Female Artists from the Republic to Present*, held at Istanbul Archaeology Museums. She stands in heavy clothes of warm autumnal colors besides the Turkish painter Tomur Atagök, who has lately taken on a more polychromatic character in recent pictures, compared to her relatively muted attire nearly three decades past. Her archive at Salt Research is the source for these photos in which Beykal stands across from painters Neşe Erdok, famous for disproportional figures and artist Nur Koçak. These powerful women changed the face of Turkish art, and in the process, redefined male-dominated stereotypes of regional cultural leadership through creativity, touching on the world of business. A harmonious note of historical relativity between when the photos were taken at the Istanbul Archaeology Museum and now is in the portrayal of İnci Eviner, who watched as former Prime Minister Tansu Çiller, Turkey's first and only female prime minister, and former Culture Minister Fikri Sağlar eyed a spastic work of multimedia two-dimensional sculpture excavating prehistoric motifs and semi-representational figures.

Eviner is currently showing a new series of works, titled, *What Remains, What Returns, Implications*, only a few steps away from Salt Beyoğlu at Galeri Nev Istanbul. Her style is deeply informed by studies of the subconscious imagination, with historical references and trains of thought that fleck and spray to abandon across the ink-black empyrean of nightmares and daydreams. And as an innovator whose works continue to influence contemporary art in Turkey, she is in good company at the Forum show of vintage photographs.

August 21, 12:12 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Faiths

Through the looking glass, the wandering seer spies sacred texts from the three great monotheistic traditions, their illuminated calligraphy rendered to the finest wisp of an ink brush flicked centuries past.

A dazzlingly detailed piece, *Decorated Text Page, Book of Exodus, from Rothschild Pentateuch* appears first, as is chronological to the historical precedence of the kindred, Abrahamic faiths. Made in 1296 by an unknown hand, it is a supreme example of premodern artistry toward the end of the infamous Dark Ages, out of which the West emerged.

Without supreme knowledge of the folk embellishments and institutional umbrella under which the anonymous painter-scribes worked, it is impossible to assess the visual and textual references of this overwhelmingly baroque, gold leaf manuscript. However, a naive eye has a fantasy land of explorative potential across its opaque, magisterial beauty. Following in line within a context in which bestiaries were popularly conceived, the Torah flies with imagination.

Integrated within the living architecture of what is likely a creative portrayal of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, or an incarnation thereof, the columned and buttressed holy structure of religious magnificence stands square atop the main bodies of text – held up, as it were, by streaming vegetal spires, tail-like and ethereal. The color scheme, a rustic invention of vibrant oranges, cerulean and plush purples, evokes the velvet airs of the era, in which clothing fashions were dominated by the fusty pomp of its softness.

Lion-headed dragons grow like flowers atop the corners of the temple, its sharp corners are winged with fire, bejeweled and encrusted with precious stone, yet also retaining an organic naturalism, however otherworldly. Within its three chambers, a white stork lunges upward into a coruscant haze of stars. Enwrapped in vines, their necks entwined, a pair of mammalian birds face-off, embedded in the multilayered architectural dream. The Hebrew for "David" is set within the maelstrom of swirling abstractions and geometric complexities.

The Rothschild Pentateuch is in codex form, not the typical scroll of most Torahs as they are used ritually in synagogues today. Pentateuch is a Greek word meaning "five books" – referring to the books of Moses, including Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This is the core of the Hebrew bible. In the thirteenth century, when calligraphers created the masterpiece at the Getty, they were serving Jews in northern Europe, particularly those who settled in the Rhineland – later referred to as the Ashkenazi.

The Ashkenazim form the largest component of the world's Jewish population, accounting for about eighty percent of communities around the world. The etymology of Ashkenaz refers to the name of the great-grandson of the Biblical Noah, from whom the Jews of northern Europe claim direct descent. Coincidentally, it was during the time of the forging of the Rothschild Pentateuch

when European Jews assumed their title as Ashkenazis. Likely, an itinerant Jewish scribe declared it.

Transgressing restrictions that kept Jews out of painting guilds, the scribe would work with local artists, often Christians. This being the case, invaluable works of this kind can be seen as the result of interfaith collaboration. As the first Hebrew manuscript in the Getty collection, illuminated across a thousand magic-inspiring pages, it is one of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible produced during the Middle Ages. With two main varieties of Hebrew script, it is a powerful demonstration of the literary and artistic treasury of its contemporary aesthetics.

The art of illuminating the Bible risked being lost in time by the fifteenth century when Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press. Its exacting elegance is as humbling as the message of Jesus himself. Inscribed in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Ge'ez, Armenian and other languages, the New Testament leaped from its Hebraic ancestor with epistles of the prophet's disciples, accounts of his life, and a tale of the apocalypse. One copy of a particularly sumptuous production from 1450 at Getty was made for the cathedral of Cologne in Germany.

The manuscript detail, known as *Initial P: Saint Paul* is attributed to the Circle of Stefan Lochner. As movable type was just beginning to revolutionize the political dimensions of social life, overthrowing the foundations of historical religion and public education, illuminated Bibles gained a rarified appreciation. By 1450, the Circle of Stephen Lochner finished the Bible toward the end of Gutenberg's relatively long life (passing away at seventy-eight, he lived twice as long as most people of his day).

The decorated letters are practically sculptural, as they leap out of the parchment with a spherical visual pull. Medieval artists who worked on illuminated manuscripts essentially practiced a premodern version of op art, contrasting precise geometrical abstraction against figurative realism, mostly of saints and prophets, and gilded calligraphy. A fascinating, almost multimedia dimensionality comes into focus where the illuminator painted Apostle Paul inside the loop of the letter "P" – pointing and eyeing his words, as revealed. It is a theatrical holy text.

And finally, a Quran from the ninth century (second century AH), known as *Bifolium from a Fragmentary Qur'an*, presents, among its many internal treasures, decorated pages from Surat al-An'am – specifically lines 121-122 of the sixth chapter. Their content refers to the ethics of diet and the miracle of resurrection. But the innovative visual wonders of its display on the sepia-toned paper, handed down for over a millennium, speak of self-mastery and the strength of the human will to outperform itself, to inspire moral thought with sublime joy and solemn respect for the fickle nature of consciousness and the whims of creation.

The remote curation from the Getty describes how early Muslim scribes and artists performed their unique adaptations of the manuscript traditions that they have ultimately shared with their coreligionists of the three Abrahamic traditions. Quranic calligraphers would trace Arabic layers first before placing gold leaves with special care onto the word "Allah." There were certain

effects to indicate logistical aspects of ritual readings, as concerns the ceremonial usage of such manuscripts. Each chapter ends with ornamental rosettes.

With its hue of indigo blue against alternating shades of sandy beige, the ambiance is that of North Africa or the deserts that span much of the geography for countries in which Islam is the majority faith. *Bifolium from a Fragmentary Qur'an* at the Getty is likely from Tunisia, as the L.A. museum's curators speculate that its texts were recited aloud at the Great Mosque in Kairouan, a small landlocked city surrounded by the Sahara Desert. The layered surface weaves across calligraphic semi-abstraction almost like a carpet. It has a grooved, metallic aesthetic born of its greater cultural spirituality, defined by simplicity and directness.

August 31, 2:50 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Treasures

With an astute eye for collections, after roaming tirelessly through biennial galas for the past thirteen years and running, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston has added some invaluable art history treasures to one of its more unique departments, that of the *Art of the Islamic Worlds*.

For its tenth anniversary in 2017, the department's curators assembled their highlights, currently on view via online exhibition, encompassing the epochal breadth of multicultural invention that has been refined and cultivated since the seventh century with religious zeal.

The very first specimen, glorified by interactive photography and detailed texts, is a ceramic bowl labeled, *A Galleon at Sea*, attributed to a Turkish ceramicist and dated to the first half of the seventeenth century. There are oversized, perhaps mythological spirit fishes that float beneath the hull of the centered image of the craft, their red eyes and green gills flashing in the gleaming, aquamarine paint that matches the sails of the elegant three-masted ship. The venturesome exhilaration of embarking over the wild deep is conveyed visually with lively, animate grace.

The digital curation by MFA Houston quotes from *The Seven Voyages of Sinbad*, torn as from the pages of the Arabian Nights, wherefrom the tale derives. It speaks of a parallel theme to that of the art collection itself, only couched in the swashbuckling milieu of old, where a proud and trailblazing merchant sets off from Baghdad, their watercraft bulging with precious fortunes of creative industry from one of Islam's easternmost bastions of cultural fruition. But a storm knocks them off their path and changes their fate, one might say, to Houston, Texas.

The symbolism of the ship has spiritual potency but, in a more practical sense, also illustrates the means by which peoples traded their fine arts and aesthetic ideas, toward a pedagogy of traditional handwork and its relation to such undying worldly themes as beauty, devotion and power. Like the airplane today, the seafaring vessel indicated to the eyes of yore the international logistics of premodern interconnectivity, from port to port, where people and objects, goods and thoughts intermingled liberally, appreciated by their movement.

An anonymous artist or group of artists manufactured *A Galleon at Sea* in Turkey's Iznik district in the western province of Bursa, famously one of the fastest beating hearts of material creativity in Ottoman times. The designs are a fusion of styles, which Turks inherited from the Chinese, particularly apparent in the swirling patterns of waves, which look like scrolls, a direct quote from Ming porcelain. Also, the boat itself reveals, to expert analysts, elements of Ottoman and European shipbuilding, exemplifying the busy waters that washed up against all of the lands that were once under Istanbul's sway.

One piece at MFA Houston is a plate molded to a concave shape called "tondino," after the Italian form, with its wide rim and semicircular cavetto, a concave moulding. The annular whorls were not merely aesthetic, however, but were, as the curatorial statement confirms, a measure of



scientific accomplishment, derived from research into the proportional compatibility of each special work of pottery.

Yet, the *Tondino* piece at MFA Houston, dated to the first half of the sixteenth century, retains its attractive charms, as the constellation-like cartographic patterns mused on the sweeping imperial signature of Suleiman I, known as Suleiman the Magnificent. Similar ceramics, such as from Safavid Iran and early thirteenth century Persia speak of shared histories, albeit through altered perspectives and varicolored lenses of technical and imagistic distinction. Aimee Froom, curator of the museum's *Art of Islamic Worlds*, discussed the context of inscribed Persian lustreware.

“There are actually inscriptions of Persian poetry as well as blessings in Arabic. This is typical of Kashan lusterware to include a form of blessings usually to the owner, and longer literary texts in Persian,” Froom relayed over a voice recording as part of the online exhibition.

This really suggests a degree of bilingualism for the makers of these ceramics, as well as the consumers, a highly literate society. Kashan is a city in Iran. This is where there was a great center for lustreware production.

Although divided throughout their histories by the often shifting, embattled borders of their respective empires, Persia and Turkey enjoyed mutual sparks of highly imaginative works in the fields of ceramics, glass, ivories, metalwork, textiles and illuminated manuscripts. Oftentimes these diverse approaches to the plastic arts commingled. The piece, *Tile with Shahada*, emerged from the ateliers of Damascus in the sixteenth century. The circular, calligraphed ceramic represents the transmission from Mamluk to Ottoman cultural production.

So as not to appropriate the greater contexts for which these historical pieces were originally created, MFA Houston noted how the *Tile with Shahada* would have been used to commemorate landmarks and buildings. But going further, the online exhibit invites viewers to peruse the interior of the Sokollu Mehmet Pasha Mosque via a virtual, 360-degree walkthrough. The seamless integration of ceramics like *Tile with Shahada* is clear, intricately embellishing the turquoise walls of the Muslim sanctuary built in 1571.

Art historians in Houston, Texas preserved an early Quran, dated to 718 AH (1318 AD), from Morocco. Houston-based curator of the *Art of Islamic Worlds* collection, Froom, speaks of the cultural value of the piece for its comprehensive colophon, essentially a descriptive page listing the names, dates and places of production, a rare find for an illuminated Islamic manuscript scribed during the late Medieval era, from North Africa no less. Its Maghribi script and geometric decoration mirror the design genius of all fine Islamic art.

Arguably one of the more cherished works of manuscript art at MFA Houston is a folio from a religious epic narrating the life and death of the Prophet Mohammad. It is titled, *Siyer-i Nebi* (“Life of the Prophet”), first composed in the fourteenth century by the writer Darir and later bankrolled by Sultan Murad III two hundred years later, resulting in six volumes overseen by the

Turkish calligrapher Lütfi Abdullah. Surrounding the Arabic script, the gilded page frames the scene of a feast, as two men genuflect seated in robes and green turbans.

The first, second and sixth volumes of the 1594 commission by Sultan Murad III are still held in Istanbul at the Topkapı Museum Library, whereas the other parts are scattered between New York and Ireland. The fifth volume remains lost. With the aid of MFA Houston's technology, admirers may gawk at a digitized version of the work through photo-real augmented reality. It is almost like beholding the priceless manuscript itself instantly anywhere. The miniature painting represents an apex of creative wonder which continues to inform Turkish artists today.

September 4, 10:08 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Visualizations

In his ninth decade, Sarkis is still on fire. Born of the ashes that provoke nostalgia among his multigenerational kith of old Istanbul, he is, excuse the clichés, a living legend of Duchamp-like grandmaster status, particularly among art world aficionados. For his most recent opening at Dirimart on Sept. 10, titled *Untitled*, he zoomed in for a call with fellow culturati from Paris, delighting collegial curators, publishers and intellectual comrades of all stripes from that city of luminaries where he has lived and belonged to since the 1960s.

Digital patchworks of scannable QR codes are placed at each end of the expansive main gallery floor inside Dirimart, a decidedly commercial outfit earnestly affirming Turkey as integral to the critical establishment of art and the development of its international canon. Situated amid the bustling din of the Dolapdere quarter in Beyoğlu district, the socioeconomic diversity of the overburdened, urban environment contrasts with unequivocal contemporary visions of newly curated art alongside the inner-city freeway's growing cultural ecology, shared with Evliyagil, Arter and Pilevneli galleries.

Not weighed by history, as the local communities appear to be, so many low-income migrants and minorities who endure various manual labor in the surrounding neighborhoods, Sarkis places an everlasting, however virtual, flame within the palms of his venturesome seers. To forego the risks of an ongoing global pandemic that has claimed nearly a million lives and to bear witness to the life of objects and experience firsthand with its spatial dimension, a person essentially takes their life in their hands.

But as the trickster that he is, Sarkis turned assumptions around and has, in place of a purely palpable and immediate course of sense perception, reproduced computer simulation, only site-specifically, as an image beheld within an image, perhaps analogous to the idea of a dream within a dream.

As a concept artist whose primary medium could be said to be that of the installation, Sarkis has made a career out of producing work that defies much of the material objectification that would circumscribe originality and creativity into an intellectualized commodity that while valued abstractly is still arguably dependent on the industrial complex for its existence. His art perpetuates the postmodern focus on the greater contexts in which works are shown, be it in a gallery, museum, city, community, nation, aesthetic or theoretical movement.

Two of the broadest walls within the interior of Dirimart face each other with blood-red inflammations of visual lore, which Sarkis collected over the years behind the uncanny lens of his distinctive photography. Shot through with beams of light, the past rears its ugly head, blazing like an inferno of the archetypal subconscious, replete with a surrealistic menagerie of skulls adorned with eighteenth-century wigs and Lakota headdresses, prehistoric goddess statues, German words, African ceremonialists, street life and varieties of architectural perspective.

At the very end of the crimson-suffused smorgasbord of images, a band of neon tubes electrifies the air with a shock of rainbow hues. It is to symbolize the future that awaits, like the mythical pot of gold, before all goes white, and the mystery of the unknown that awaits emerges as a blank slate of unconsciousness. But these pictures are broken, and there are ample glowing forms of the crucifix throughout the show. Only it is not by way of occidental history that Sarkis approaches his subjects.

Inspired by the peculiar craft of cracked pottery in Japan, known as *kintsugi*, Sarkis did not merely appropriate exotic knowledge like any kleptomaniac Orientalist but instead fused, both conceptually and physically, the Japanese technique with his special adaptation of stained-glass. The result expresses a powerful, and lucid continuity between his materials and the histories and ideas that he has sought to convey with them. Across from the temporal, collagist mural are individuated works of fissured photographic panes.

One of these pieces portrays a man walking through the rubble of Istanbul in the bitter wake of two days, known as the September events of 1955. And beside him, hanging on the adjacent surface is a pictorial arrangement inspired by the tragedies after a painting by the late Turkish artist Aliye Berger, often sharing her reputation with Fahrelnissa Zeid, her sister. Although Berger was middle-aged when she made the piece, it is a bleary-eyed smog of confusion, something primal, child-like or enraged.

To break up such concerns as that which Sarkis addressed as a public figure and progressive freethinker in his own right, the curation of *Untitled* draped a Persian rug over Dirimart's gallery floor in the front of an original painting by Sarkis, which he also enlarged as a video work. The eye-shaped smear of orange and white looks over the complex weave with Farsi calligraphy from the *Book of Kings*, which inspired Morton Feldman to notate music, *Spring of Chosroes* (1976), based on its patterns. It resonates with the ideas of Sarkis.

The original Berger painting, titled *Fire* (1955), has been compared to the inimitable 1893 canvas *The Scream* by Edvard Munch for its bewildering coloration. On loan from the personal collection of Sarkis, the mystifying frame of emotional outpouring hangs around the corner in a smaller, contiguous room at Dirimart, where the more intrepid art lovers of the season may wear gloves and handle limited edition publications by Norgunk, a literary cohort of Sarkis and other freethinking artists and writers based in Istanbul.

Among the volumes in reference is one called, *The Treasure Chests of Mnemosyne*, which Sarkis edited with art historian Uwe Fleckner, piecing together texts by Plato, Friedrich Nietzsche, Marcel Proust and Jacques Derrida where the cerebral heavyweights have hypothesized on the nature of memory. Mnemosyne, of course, is the Greek goddess of memory, celebrated as the mother of muses. And although the work of Sarkis has practically fallen off the edge of modernity because he is so utterly contemporary, *Untitled* contextualizes his oeuvre more reflexively.

Smack dab in the center of the exhibition is a burned wooden crate. It is a revision of an earlier work that he last showed in 1992, when a Turkish art critic insulted him outright, personally, professionally and intolerably, targeting his identity. Sarkis did not respond in words but by creating art. The neon evocation of his birth year, 1938, with an added 0, made for a bold statement, in which the artist exclaimed his immortality. While the indecorous railing of the art critic is long lost to the paper mill, in the year 19380, Sarkis will live on, on fire, red with life.

September 13, 5:38 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Transnational

There are breadths of time and experience that have occurred and on looking back dissolve into the ether of wonder, diluted by means of remembrance. Without a reflexive build, the past is dusty and must be blown, like a wisher over a candle, thinking up a dream-like tale or a feeling unknown but wanted. And so it goes, with the Ottoman past, particularly when memorialized and researched in its former capital of Istanbul, there is a dizzying complex of orders and modes by which to sift through its behemoth mound of remains, unburied, dank.

The critical attempts of Salt to publicize its efforts in time travel, or historical research, are quite valorous, to the effect that dead narratives are retold, faded maps redrawn and the entire scope and spectrum of lives lived, in thought and action, on paper and as recorded, continue to have a place in the postmodern, or contemporary consciousness. But there are pitfalls within such endeavors, as to brave that leap between that which is recovered, and so, of course, decontextualized from its original place and time, in search of ongoing relevance.

In the subtext of curating material that has become, by definition, anachronistic, considering the wider sociocultural and multimedia environment in which it is seen, not to mention the political moment, what is then conveyed are the organs of its display and the manner in which it is recounted so as to make it communicable, knowable, perhaps amusing or aesthetically invigorating. In that case, *Between Empires*, *Beyond Borders* both succeeds and fails to show its subject, while reflecting today's percepts.

The story begins, imaginably, with the sound of a creaking rocking chair. There are cobwebs in the corners of an old log cabin in the woods around Beykoz district. An elderly woman is knitting and muttering under her breath, while her daughter, a middle-aged academician with a family of her own, listens. Her mother is talking about Leocadie Tallibart of Brittany, who in 1842 married an Austro-Hungarian immigrant in Istanbul. They spill their tea, and the yarn continues without the needed stimulant. In America, their grandson is too tired to hit snooze.

Between family histories and the chronicles of civilization that run parallel in broader public spheres, Salt Beyoğlu has sought to capture and relay, through a variety of media, formidable amounts of the subject matter. But the sense of focus trained by *Between Empires*, *Beyond Borders* is generally fuzzy. There are seemingly random, almost eccentric detours of the historic occasion, such as the events of April 29, 1903, in which anarchist Bulgarian komitadjis (armed militia members) bombed the Imperial Ottoman Bank in the Vilayet of Salonica.

The installation of a cultural history exhibition is a microcosm of its more worldly export, those mornings, afternoons and evenings now relegated to the black-and-white pages and images of documentable evidence. Unless versed as a local, educated in the Turkish curricula since childhood, which is steeped in Ottoman lore, the main thematic account of Austro-Hungarian patriarchy and their lives in Istanbul, sometimes far-flung to the stretches of their host empires' lands, are as obscure as they are curious.

It seems that, from a confessedly naive and superficial first impression as a foreigner, *Between Empires, Beyond Borders* is at a loss for a core thread that runs through its utterly convoluted web of visualized, walkthrough historiography. With an eye for the field of contemporary art, in which Salt Beyoğlu excels with unrivaled distinction in accord with its archival, research-oriented framework, the cartoons of Antoine Köpe and the photographs of his brother Taib offer a tantalizing window into the personal freshness of their perspectives.

Köpe was wealthy enough to enjoy what luxuries were common during his age, among them, the rarefied import of cinema. Salt Beyoğlu is showing a clip from the comedic 1906 film, *Soap Bubbles* by Georges Méliès, a pioneer at the outset of celluloid production. Köpe, the grandson of Andras, the patriarch of the Köpe family tree in Turkey, recounted when he first saw a film, as a five-year-old child in 1902. He thought it was magic that made the apparitions of light appear before him, and he feared the dark.

Köpe, however, would spend his life plunging straight into the heart of that darkness, trying his hand as a cartoonist. His sketches from the years of World War I are reminiscent of one of the very first war comedies, *Shoulder Arms*, made by Charlie Chaplin in 1918, the year Köpe drew such illustrations as *The Regalits' tires* (1918), showing a superior officer dragging a cigar in the back of an automobile that's leaking hot air out of one of its tires as the driver is unaware. It could be an apt metaphor for the ignorance of warmongers.

In those uncertain years, by the end of the second decade of the last century, when the entire world was changing at everyone's feet, Köpe drew men in uniform with a humanist gaze, teasing out the weary lines of a sentinel waiting at the door of a barracks in Istanbul, or venturing into official portraiture, when, in 1915, he drew Paul von Hindenburg, the German chief of general who later served as president of the Weimar Republic from 1925 to 1934. Nearby are acerbic cartoons that Köpe made for *La Defense*, an Ottoman political journal.

While any number of various ways and approaches could be employed to focus on the sprawling exhibition, *Between Empires, Beyond Borders* may suffice for a more critical review. The illustrations of Köpe served to personalize and characterize a kindred mood. One that could very well have transpired after a heady argument among the brothers and men of the multicultural, transnational family on any given nightfall in their bygone Istanbul, when, over drinks and newspapers, rags and appetizers, they may have wondered, even amid such monumental historic change, if future generations might also remember them.

September 18, 11:23 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## In-Depth

Like architecture turned inside out, into a hyper-conscious experience of interior space, the works of Nuri Kuzucan have a way of reflecting the subtextual blueprints of rooms and hallways such as at Galerist. In the historical building, where a contemporary art gallery has renovated the airs and contours of structural thought from a century past in continuity with present taste, doorframes and ceiling light come to embody principles of the aesthetic display.

On entering the second floor, which, as through an underground tunnel, winds through closed, musty confines, artificial bulbs extend along the upper perimeters, accentuated by the off-white painted walls. An almost perfectly squared work of acrylic on canvas by Kuzucan stuns with its scale, and by the span of its variation on a rectangular motif, adapting mute tones from pale to opaque, however with a greenish-brown tinge.

The distinctive quality of *Re-construction* (2020) is, by force of repetition, an evocation of Kuzucan's visual vocabulary. With the mind of an installation artist, and peculiarly fitting for Galerist, Kuzucan's works are intimate captures of the curatorial area in which they are shown, as in silent dialogue with their surroundings, reflexive, perhaps subjective. The effect is enveloping in a political moment when the white cube has come under fire in the art world.

Instead of prompting uppish remoteness, however, the art of Kuzucan is inviting, offering a window of windows into another world, that, simply by the act of looking, opens to receive even its most naive and skeptical seers. And yet, for all of its technical precision and exploration of logic made visible, *Re-construction* is not entirely exacting, retaining elements of the organic, following through to the nature of illusion.

Across from *Re-construction*, though curiously out of sight beside the entranceway before the main gallery halls of Galerist and practically invisible for its white-on-white scheme, are a pair of works, *Model 1* (2020) and *Model 2* (2020). They are minimalistic by impression, but not by design, as they integrate, wood, glass and paper media, and utilize the subtle phenomena of shadow as innate to their physical and theoretical expressions.

The effect of diagonal over straight lines, of glass as material over a manifest shape, reconfigures the notion of the abstract and the practical. In an anthropocentric world in which unnatural figments of formality, such as right angles, are employed to abandon, and have become necessary to the manufacture and maintenance of modern civilization, nature itself is relegated to unworkable abstraction, when it would otherwise be the opposite.

With a similar approach, or at least in consequence, *Open Space 2* curated a work by Seçkin Pirim, titled *The Resulting Process #1* (2020). Fashioned like the remains of a handcraft workshop out of layers of Bristol paper cut-outs, the piece contrasts sharp linearity against curves and wisps. Again, through repetition, in this case overlapped paper, the work makes non-ordinary sources of perception comprehensible, and even part of a visual language.



Everywhere in *Open Space 2* there is a sense of floatation, of human construction suspended in spaces that are open, and by that meaning free of fixed perspective, as a hypothetical place where experimentation and interpretation are not bound to the pressures of canonization and permanence. *Diptych Space* (2020), in contrast, is more composed than *Re-construction*, instilling a simulacrum of absolute dimensionality.

As a recreation of digital virtuality, *Diptych Space* has that fragmented appearance of computerized figuration, like an outline. In his body of work, particularly in *Diptych Space*, Kuzucan excels when conveying depth. With lines of shadow and scale and a focus on the emptiness that defines form, the acrylic canvas is a multivalent demonstration of op-art beyond genre pretense, as the sheer craft of a meticulous, conceptual painter.

The floor plan at Galerist has kept, in many ways, the antique spirit and constitution of its past, resembling the classy residential blocks of Beyoğlu district that were once the toast of Istanbul's multicultural, international elite around Istiklal Avenue. One work at *Open Space 2* retains that homely atmosphere, only rendered to the underlying theme of the show's curation. It is *Untitled* (2006-2020) by Suat Akdemir, consisting of frames torn of their painted canvases.

The materials are described as "7 aligned frames, interfered pieces of canvas" and together relay the deepening of spatial echo that Akdemir and Kuzucan executes with such originality as that which grace his scratched starts. The idea of interference could be synonymous with emptying, an essential aspect towards the discovery, or articulation, of openness. Beside it, a framed, inked piece of paper by Canan Tolon, *Datça* (1997), has the show's recurring, noetic interiority.

As from below the city grid, Kuzucan's deft work, *Black Cubes, White Gaps* (2020) is reminiscent of how the blocks and lots of Istanbul might appear underground, as their foundations drag across the temporal plane, shifting, vulnerable to dislodgment. *Black Cubes, White Gaps* is slight on the whiteness that would slip between the utter existence of concretized construction. For visual emphasis, Kuzucan exaggerates its basic pattern.

Befitting the cubic design, a new work by Sinan Logie titled *Fluid Structures — Phase 20* (2020) is ultramodern in its presentation of plastic boxes, variously filled with water and ink. There is something about the gleaming, polymeric surface, resinous, containing liquid, that exudes texture. *Black Cubes, White Gaps* adds a mystical, illusive touch, feeling by its sight alone like that of smooth ebony, or a polished magnet, despite being two-dimensional.

There is a concerted harmony of successive associations that could be drawn from the works of Kuzucan as a whole. *Black Cubes, White Gaps* is related to *Black and White Line*, essentially a simpler version of certain aspects of the former. Then developed further, his larger-scale work, *Blacks, Greys and Whites* (2019) bears aesthetic connectivity in the oblong, sideways collectivism of elements at play in *Re-construction*.

Departing from filled shapes to that of thick, intersecting lines, Kuzucan's piece *Perspective* (2020) lures the eye into its contiguous web, approaching with boldness, at times distantly faint, and it would seem mathematically precise in its representation of dimension, scale, proportion. Still, what it arguably conveys most potently is a visual agent by which to imagine open space. In the urban jungle around Galerist, *Open Space 2* is a welcome tonic.

September 25, 12:26 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Alchemical

The title is a sequence of symbols. A dotted circle is greater than a continuous circle, so Bora Başkan asserts, which, although abstract in its significance is perhaps a nod to the concept of the unfinished, or the transparent, as more expansive than that which is, by appearances, complete or solid. The suspicion of solidity, then, is a recurrent motif in the work of Başkan, who seems to ask burning, timeless questions with his latest series of painterly sculptures and sculptural paintings. These queries investigate the origin of matter and its imagination.

Did stones emerge from mountains or mountains from stones? Can natural formations be seen as a kind of sculpture, or at once, of earthen image-making? As painting was initially conceived in caves, on broad mineral surfaces, at what point did prehistoric artists consider stone itself for their subjects? If these first human artists attempted to visualize reflection, as by the images of nature, painting the medium itself on their medium's surface, at what point can images be seen as distinct from their source, or as a unitary manifestation?

Such interrogations into the heart of earth, creation, perception and artificiality continue to haunt contemporary artists, as they have since time immemorial. Painting goes back some 40,000 years. For example, murals in the El Castillo Cave in Spain are said to predate the earliest sculptures, Venus figurines found in Germany, by about 5,000 years. Başkan paints, and sculpts, with an intuitive eye for geological time, crafting eruptions of planetary genesis. With its balanced curation at Öktem Aykut, his multidimensional works are visions of texture.

The spare interior of the two-story white cube in Istanbul is host to an eccentric band of represented artists, among which Başkan earns his keep. Left untitled, suspending across the rough, bleached interior, the naturalistic canvases and non-representational statuettes hang over raw shale flooring. The molds defy figurative definition yet have an aesthetically pleasing charm for their apparent sense of completion. And held up to the soft light of the paintings, whose contours and facets are utterly related, the eye sees them as visual art, as images.

Başkan's show at Öktem Aykut could, from a critical perspective, be described as one of the most successful, or at least impressive, ventures in teasing out sight-based appreciation for abstract, contemporary sculpture. By creating a parallel, a multimedia corollary, between the traditional arts, the rebound effect instills consciousness and identity, toward a musing on the embodiment of the imagination as a reflection of form, like that of water's innate mirroring in relation to the moon, a leaf or an incarnation of Narcissus.

They are like pedestals at the base of the isolated hills that rise sharply, thinning out toward their plateauing summits. Light white paint traces their edges, an agglomeration of blocks that ascend atop each other, patterned with geometric intimacy. A rock formation below swirls across its face, as a bunch of ruddy boulders lean, darkly at its posterior. But the ground is vague, and although it might come across as being of Earth, there is an otherworldly air about its artistry.

An abstract, egg-white sculpture stands on an off-white, rectangular column. It begins arboreal as a trunk pocked with slight depressions, curving narrowly down, upright and flat at its bottom. About halfway up its bent spine, there are indents that fan out in knotty protrusions. And then it thins, and extends, ascending with exacting detail so as to flesh out its dynamic exploration of concavities and convexities, a wealth of formal changes enough to allow the eye ample space over which to rove, appreciate and move through its contiguous invention.

The pair of works, two- and three-dimensional, chart a path of perceptibility that is mutually animating, almost liquid. And intriguing in relation to the art history precedence of painting before sculpture, Başkan's canvases execute stone-like forms with sharper lines, which are further defined and arguably earthlier than his effigies of abstraction. He deepens these exercises by visualizing feeling, like the sense of touch with paintings of his flowing sculptural aesthetic, set on pedestals.

Beside signature degrees of gray that illumine into ethereal threads of light, Başkan is a skilled colorist, employing vibrant reds and muted greens against his otherwise subdued palette of pale black and misty ash. The piece within the piece takes shape toward its uppermost reaches, coming to a point. Its rose-hued base is reflecting throughout, also in the hazy background so as to affect the ambiance of its tonal mixture. It is interesting to also see how the paintings of Başkan are more diverse than their sculptural counterparts.

One such piece includes a succession of interiors, the piece-within-the-piece effect, as five works are erected on pedestals, two of which are pedestals themselves, painting as a psychological construction zone of impractical structures. However, one object-like figment is reminiscent of a prehistoric animal figurine, especially as it is placed beside an antler-shaped bone fragment. Beside the two semi-representational compositions are building blocks characteristic to Başkan's highland oeuvre of glacial cliffs and swirling mineralized ovals.

There is a subtle primordial atmosphere to Başkan's show, as its preliterate, pictographic title might imply. One shelf of eight small statuettes relates a visual equivalent of that which may have come before the 35,000-year-old Venus of Hohle Fels but which have yet to be recognized as part of art history, for abstraction is generally identified within the realm of modernism. But what Başkan's work provokes is the idea that figurative art would have followed in the same manner that an infant utters nonsense words before learning phonetics.

The many works in the show at Öktem Aykut offer a tantalizing variation on the themes that pertain to how sculpture and painting are related, with an eye for art history. But the boutique gallery is also a world unto itself and like the art of Başkan, aligns with its own history, traditions, techniques and crafts. The curation is unique, such as when paintings extend out sculpturally, attached to walls, as on the second floor of the space, a reprieve from the city, silent as stone.

It is a sample of how Istanbul still retains some of the precious elements of artwork produced on the institutional fringe, independent of the hypercritical Westward establishment and the consumer status quo. The works are not entirely virtuosic and even have a quiet minimalism, like finding a special rock half-covered in sand on a remote beach. But there are aspects that trigger wonder, magic and thought, an apt source of meditation on the power of perception to break through the mold of the imagination and its origination in materiality.

October 2, 8:46 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Manuscripts

The writing and publication of books, in all of their multivalent forms, reflect the broader media context out of which they have been produced. The written word is, like music or painting, a medium through which people convey images, tell stories and imprint their cultural milieu toward a social advancement of ideas. From readership to the collection, however, the history of writing is also a tale of sequential obsolescence. Engravings on clay, later ink on leaves and scrolls of parchment, led to paperbacks and now, ebooks.

The ancient practice of inscribing, disseminating and preserving records through the visual symbolization of spoken language, developed to encompass the span of human creativity, beyond tangible accounting and practical communication. Drawing from a vast regional source in which languages merged, in writing and speech, for millennia, the Ottoman Empire came to encircle and absorb the storytelling traditions of Persia, Arabia, the Islamic world and the Turkic origins of its ruling dynasty, increasingly influenced by outsiders from all directions.

In Pera district, the Istanbul Research Institute has mounted a state-of-the-art multimedia exhibition including some rare and invaluable specimens of illuminated manuscript art from the Ottoman Empire. The theoretical focus of the show examines how creative expressions of its bygone civilization came to change. The first rumors of modernization could be said to have surfaced when books began to be printed in mass quantities mechanically following the spread of the movable type, initially invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the fifteenth century.

The print revolution prompted by Gutenberg essentially coincided with the rise of Ottoman literacy. Yet, on the edges of Europe, Ottoman lands held fast to eastward trends. Books or manuscripts, even those illuminated with stunning artistic embellishment, were to premodern, non-Western readers, like extended conversations. In that way, “Memories of Humankind” has uniquely curated a vision of Ottoman manuscripts as the accumulated thought of their readers.

For many centuries, the streets of Istanbul hummed with literary minds who delighted in the prestige of their words, glorified meticulously by the painstaking crafts of copyists, binders, frame ruling artists and illuminators. When not working, they might have spent their time, much as people do today, adrift between coffees at a local shop where freewheeling discourse echoed across the din above the bowed heads of some who, with their nose in a book, waited for their moment to raise a point that will change someone’s mind.

With a comparative sensibility, these Ottoman manuscripts can be appreciated in certain ways like that of the paintings in the Chauvet Cave in France, in which prehistoric artists worked collaboratively, and not entirely conscious of their mutual efforts, over the course of tens of thousands of years, to create masterpieces of figurative murals. Through both digital renderings and primary specimens, the curation by K. Mehmet Kentel relays countless examples of readers inscribing manuscripts with editorial remarks, opinions and proposals.

Literacy implied the skill of a copyist for educated Ottoman subjects who enjoyed a different degree of freedom than their European counterparts when it came to the production of literary, religious or ephemeral printed material. Unlike the monastic custom of copying texts remote from urban society, particularly that of Istanbul, independent Ottoman scholars were not overshadowed by the monopolization of scribes and freely wrote and expressed themselves alongside the texts they copied.

There is a richness to the textual placards throughout *Memories of Humankind*, together instilling apt regard for the history of the items shown. The verity of the texts is reinforced by the world-class erudition of the Istanbul Research Institute, as well known for its Roman, Byzantine and Republican studies. In lucid layouts, typical illuminated manuscripts from Ottoman times are dissected, highlighting the symbiosis of craft, authorship and reading. Below the model clarifications are carefully hand-picked samples.

While much of Ottoman literature was derived from the religious heritage of Islam, so as to publicize knowledge of the Quran by all means, many writers, especially poets, earned the privilege of seeing their works copied many times over in their lifetime. One such Ottoman bard was the sixteenth-century poet Baki, also known as the “sultan of poets.” Though low-born, he saw his words carry the spirit of his age to unsurpassed renown, penning such lines as, “All faces gleam for us, the Ottoman world's awe, my dear,” translated by A.Z. Foreman.

At the Istanbul Research Institute, a manuscript dated 1588-1589 is attributed to a copyist named Yusuf. The copy, under glass at the entry-floor Pera exhibition hall, is relatively spare, unelaborated with gilded geometries or the fiery floral wisps that have given manuscript art its place in art history, perhaps owing to classical austerity. Another manuscript by historian Mustafa Ali of Gallipoli, who also died the same year as Baki, in 1600, is saturated with the frame ruling art that partitions its text in a peculiarly visual, interactive light.

*Memories of Humankind* is a multimedia venture, not only into manuscripts but also the artful making of its instruments. A pen case, sharpener or writing set box is shown to have all of the glamorous regards for beautification as prepared for the copy of the text, lavishing in carved and bejeweled mother-of-pearl, ivory and ebony holders colored with vibrant dyes. These objects would have inspired readers, as copyists, to venture into the manuscript with a sense of pride, class and honor.

Baki reappears in another volume, copied by Mahmud b. Şeyh Ömer in 1580, accompanied by pages of quotations and corrections by the twentieth-century statesman and anthologist Fuad Köprülü, whose work on divan poetry is canonical. In the earlier manuscript, Baki edited the manuscript himself. Others like Köprülü included collector Şevket Rado, who would go around to secondhand booksellers to publish, in serial and book form, nineteenth-century Ottoman manuscripts, such as the popular travelogue of an ambassador to France.

If it were not for the lack of seating by which to appreciate the manuscripts, or copies, like a bygone reader might, armed with a fancy pen and an intellectual ego to match the author, *Memories of Humankind* is showing printed, visual and textual material enough to last any curious bookworm a day's worth of wonder. One room flows out from its walls with the design of Ebru, the pinkish-blue marbled paper iconic to the Turkish publishing aesthetic. There are books encased in soft lighting, among them works by Sufis, philosophers and storytellers.

October 11, 7:47 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Shadows

Since 1992, the Yapı Kredi Museum has preserved the collection of Karagöz shadow puppets that were the prolific invention of master craftsman Ragıp Tuğtekin, who in the 1930s, conceived of countless unique figures. A selection of one hundred and eighty-seven pieces from this acquisition, originally purchased from Tuğtekin by Yapı Kredi Bank in the 1950s, is now on display at the newly opened multi-floor exhibition venue of the world-class institution on Istanbul's famous Istiklal Street.

Tuğtekin based his theatrical creations on humans, animals and supernatural beings from the rich treasury of Turkish and Ottoman folk tales. Unmistakable characters from such beloved and overplayed yarns like *The Muddleheaded Nightwatch* (in Turkish, *Aptal Bekçi*) are backlit across curated walls that tease out the nostalgic ways in which these stories were told, as seen with handmade visualizations.

The craft of making Karagöz figures requires a knowledge of how to procure, engrave and dye leather tanned from camels, cattle, ox or any equivalent known among those colorful minds who had the downtime in bygone eras to amuse themselves and their closest kith and Tuğtekin had a peculiar talent for the outmoded skill. Karagöz, which means “black eye” in Turkish, recalls the long nights of premodern, live entertainment prior to today's screens.

Whether on pleasure trips to the canals of Kağıthane, at the waterfalls of Yalova witnessing a “reverse marriage” or any other variety of animated happenstance at public baths, gardens or poetry contests, Karagöz conjures up a multitude of reincarnating personages, like a trickster of the East come to claim the hearts and minds of those who, enshrouded in shadow, might imagine the remaking of the world.

The cinematic theater of Karagöz drove medieval fantasy into the role-playing archetypes of early modernism, and all with a sense of humor. The tarot card of the fool looks straight ahead as they step into the future, one foot over the edge of a cliff, fabulously ignorant. In like manner, Karagöz, in the guise of *The Muddleheaded Nightwatch*, for example, exudes the mundane bliss and mortal curiosity of being, one so caught on the stage of life.

Tuğtekin could wield a nevreğan like none other. A nevreğan is a special knife used by makers of Karagöz puppets, which is used to carve the shape and facade of each distinct figure. *The Muddleheaded Nightwatch*, as exhibited in the first of several contiguous spaces at Yapı Kredi Culture Art (YKKS), is suited in a kind of plaid overcoat, booted in plain slacks with a tasseled fez. The bearded man looks one way and walks the other, oblivious, unfit for his job.

Surrounding him are a motley cast, among them gothic emanations of the antiquated Ottoman imagination, including lipsticked dragon-riders, clog-wearing demons, fancy soldiers, Black Sea fiddlers and country dancers. There are also samples of Tuğtekin's equally evocative ventures in scenography, as he had a fresh eye for floral arrangement and architectural integrity.

Within the sequence of dim rooms, in which paragraphs of text shine out with white light from black walls, a sketched picture of the Ottoman coffeehouse depicts a timeless scene in which a gathering of men, young and old, sit on the edge of their seats, laughing and jeering before a curtain. It presents the audience as the show, perhaps an industry secret for those who are backstage with a mind for production.

An elderly, robed gentleman draws from his narghile beside a trio of men enjoying a couple of cups of Turkish coffee. All are smiling under their fezzes. A few men do not wear hats, likely a nod to changing, turn-of-the-century mores as Western influences took hold. Yet, sharing appreciation for the Karagöz theater, everyone present enjoys the wholesome cheer of an event that their grandfathers likely taught them to love.

From the sixteenth to the twentieth century, Ottoman coffeehouses doubled as theater venues, where oral storytellers and traveling minstrels vied for attention among steaming cups of caffeinated revelry. The YKKS curation, by Cengiz Özek, also places in context the ephemera of printed material that accompanied these circles of cultural production and their broadcast, whether by word of mouth or through periodicals, posters, matchboxes and into digital media.

Among the ephemera that Özek curated are intriguing finds that embolden the current show by aligning with past efforts to preserve, celebrate and bolster Karagöz theater, which earned its place on UNESCO's list of the world's Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the winter of 1970, Yapı Kredi Bank mounted a Karagöz exhibition. The brochures, on display, are remnants of an older remembrance and next to the vinyls and videos, two hand drums recall lost times.

The manual technology that went into producing Karagöz theater acutely focused on each figure, an all but extinct art of shadow, or two-dimensional puppetry. Tuğtekin would have known how to select the finest strips of translucent leather and then how to pelt, cut and dye them using painstaking methods and natural ingredients. Their colorants, preceding industrial intervention, were sourced from turmeric, woad, indigo, hibiscus, cochineal and walnut bark.

After acquiring, grinding and applying yellows, blues, reds and browns from roots, Tuğtekin would fix them using alum and gum arabic. The magic that went into creating Karagöz figures, however, emerged as more than the sum of its parts, as truly it was an art that went back to the fourth century B.C., according to a 1968 study conducted in the Altai mountains by researcher Nurettin Sevin.

Apart from the figures themselves, arguably the crux of the YKKS show, Karagöz is nothing without the shadow screen. Its metaphor is that of a mirror, fashioned to the effect that audiences are spellbound by their own image looking back at them. From this psychological environment, the skeletal forms of Karagöz figurines move and speak in a primordial language that is at once childlike, and ageless.

With a profoundly comprehensive span of historical research, Özek curated a singular exhibition on the art of Karagöz, challenged by its anachronistic burial society of nostalgists typecasting its characters, stories and humor under a hoard of post-Ottoman Turkish clichés. YKY took a more holistic route, unearthing the origins of Karagöz from the blacksmith shops of fourteenth century Bursa before touching on elements of surrealism.

The show's international focus is as laudable as it is extensive. The incarnations of Karagöz in North Africa, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, the Levant and the Balkans are only the beginning of untold sagas that, both in the fictions of Karagöz and in its real-life counterparts, span the fabulist epics of China, India, Persia, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia. From the collection of Özek, shadow play figures from Southeast Asia whisper of comparative art histories.

October 16, 11:33 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Extinction

He sits, one leg over the other, by the window of a busy thoroughfare in Istanbul, and smiles over two hot cups of filter coffee. Ali Cabbar is pleased to present his work to the public of traffic jams and anxious passersby in Kabataş quarter. He has drawn, digitally, a series inspired by taxidermy, coloring and animating some of the world's most exotic, rarest mammals. His wholesome aesthetic is utterly basic, executing an approachability so familiar it is practically garish.

These formidable, poor creatures threatened with annihilation, whether due to the disintegration of their environments or hunting, look out, emotionless over a city that voids life in the name of human predominance, graced by pitiful, beloved strays, cats and dogs who are as benign as they are decorative. The plain, unrealistic eyes of his pixelated polar bear or mountain gorilla are so bluntly illustrative they even mock the blissful ignorance of children's cartoons.

Cabbar, as characteristic to his oeuvre, appears himself, as the chief representative of homo sapiens, that species of primate which is not endangered, but as he jokes, dangerous. The idea behind the installation was, apparently, to align with global, ecological awareness to conserve such endangered species as Turkey's bezoar ibex, which, when it was observed for the first time in a century last year, had simultaneously fallen into the hands of poachers.

But although his newsworthy angle might have been otherwise valiant, the mural of Cabbar screams artifice, exposing his lack of direct experience with an issue that demands lived respect for countless earthly beings and the unfathomable importance and urgency of ecological integrity in the twenty-first century. Cabbar, a former newspaper designer, has not been to the remote landscapes where these powerful creatures are revered.

His interest began when wildfires raged in Australia, where he is also a citizen. He sees the island nation as a veritable second home as he lived there for the better part of a decade. From Istanbul, Cabbar is a seasoned artist who has mounted laudable shows on social themes, recently at Adas in the far-flung Seyrantepe neighborhood, in which he tackled genetically modified food products and the future of food through futuristic still-life works.

Cabbar is taking responsibility for the killing of the last male northern white rhinoceros. At a cafe endorsing his work, he is unafraid to come forward with the statement, *I Shot the Last Rhino*, as the title of his installation for Yanköşe Project, the not-for-profit art platform sponsored by Kahve Dünyası. The didacticism of his mural is counterintuitively shocking to the point of being rude, in the literal sense of the word. Images of these precious, irreplaceable beings adorn a pale, commercial building, obscuring all meaning.

Fake-hued blue, brown, or grayish wooden backboards frame the unrealistic visages of the endangered mammals, rendered via Cabbar's virtual hand. Their display intends to impart, by a wayward glance along with the bustling, four-lane waterfront route, the fact that, there are mere

thousands of each of these creatures left in existence, in some cases less than a hundred. According to Cabbar's research, less than ninety Amur leopards live in Russia and China.

At the very top of the wall, looming above the Kordofan giraffe and the African lion, the spectacular body of the Amur leopard is reduced to a computerized color scheme – the dots of its artificial construction visible across the spotted fur. Once the mythical dream of prehistoric shamans afar in the forests of southeastern Russia and northern China, the leopard is disembodied into the multimedia fancy of modern urbanization's naive privilege over nature.

In comparison to prior, visually abstract installations of theoretical, spatial design at Yanköşe, the environmental message of Cabbar is outlandish for the corporatized arts context in which it is exhibited and seen. Coffeehouses have become part of Western cultural commoditization, a bad habit endured by the African and Asian countries in which most of these endangered animals live.

Along with his Yanköşe installation, Cabbar is a proud creative, newly releasing a volume of his life of drawing, whether by hand or at home on his desktop. Issued by Mas Publishing, it is actually two books, *Typo*, of texts, and *System Error*, of images, edited by Başak Şenova, who also contributed writing of her own to its uniquely designed pages.

Throughout, Cabbar represents himself, the image of his body, as a constant model who is sketched, sculpted, photographed, masked, costumed, performing and everywhere. He plays with opposites, hashtags, and the language of graphic design and, of course, his profile.

The text he wrote for his own book is titled, *Sicilian Defence*. Its lines are edited into the shape of chess pieces, specifically that of the pawn and horse. "The coronavirus confinement started right in the middle of preparations of this book, distracting everybody, including the writers of *Typo* and myself," he opened his text. "It's been 40 years since I made these pieces, but they seem to be as solid as a rock, yet with the fragility of ceramic. I am so proud of them, and so happy to have rediscovered them in the cupboard thanks to the 'Corontine' boredom."

It was the American novelist Henry Miller who said that a man who is constantly concerned with the world's problems either has none of his own, or refuses to face them. Cabbar sought to make the critical endangerment of the world's biodiversity visually appealing. And even after drawing himself for a lifetime, creating what he might call autobiographical art, he has needed decades before speaking out about what was inside of him all along.

October 23, 12:41 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Empty

The idea of space implies a kind of freedom, even one so theoretical as that proposed by the abstract tendencies of modernist art. The curious significance of such works as *Meydan* (*Square*, in Turkish) by Deniz Gül at Yapı Kredi Culture and Art (YKKS), however, serves not only as a source of self-reflection, but as an incisive visual and spatial demonstration, interpretive commentary on the greater environment and the intersectional urban and social infrastructure in which these pieces of pieces are set and seen, or perhaps, not seen, considering their highly elusive and ultimately, visionary manifestation.

Where there is emptiness, there is not only its opposite form but potentiality. It is no secret that economic modernism, with its technological speed and material industry, has suffused human life with unprecedented, and increasingly intensive mental saturations, psychologically overwhelming the mass of sociological and demographic determinants with floods of consumable goods, of tradable commodities, whether palpable or not, capitalizing on the nature of individual choice to abandon.

As one of the countless examples, the oblique city square that has formed between Galatasaray High School and the YKY Arts and Culture complex is just one node along the commercial promenade of Istiklal Street, where salespeople and passersby compete for the briefest attention span over the exchange of sunglasses, ice cream, umbrellas, baklava, books, education and further demands on the time of the global leisure class, such as to peruse the history of Karagöz shadow theater, or to admire the paintings of a poet.

Sandwiched in between what would otherwise be normative, mainstream modes of cultural appreciation for most people, however, is an entirely thought-provoking and utterly minimalistic, fantastically integrated installation of material-light concepts. *Meydan*, Turkish for a village or city square, offers a welcome, even tranquil divergence from the overburdening, runaway urbanization that lies just outside the institutional framework in which Gül's work might be observed, walked through and merged with daily thought, refreshing the browser of the mind.

Although there is a certain, scintillant sharpness to its design, *Meydan* sparks with personality, as presented with an informal, process-based front. The exhibition is curated by the prolific Kevser Güler, also responsible for poet Lale Müldür's painting series, "Milat" ("Milestone," in Turkish), one floor upstairs from *Meydan* at YKKS, and Arter's current group show, *Celestial Bodies*. As an artist and writer, Gül's handwritten scrawl is the face of *Meydan*, emphasizing its experimental tone, exploring the essence of nonfigurative expression.

To reinforce status-quo thinking, what might be called normalcy, intellectual transactions of everyday, conventional speech are revealed as arbitrary and rote. Even turns of phrase that might seem to make total sense, when rethought and decontextualized, take on an unusual, impersonal, sometimes inhuman character, rationalized purely based on patterns of repetition. "Good

morning," or "how are you?" when questioned theoretically are nothing more than symbolic gestures, positing sameness in the face of reality's constant change.

In the same way, the structural norms of a city are fickle, as defined by its population of human communities, and by a more enlightened ecological holism rather than by the mechanical displays of its architectural distinctiveness or the top-down narratives of its popular history. A square, or any variety of open space, is anathema to the politics of modernized, urban finance in which real estate investment rules above all. Like a dazzling, superhero blockbuster, a city's emptiness is generally filled to the brim with towers and malls.

With *Meydan*, Gül has quite cleverly exemplified an alternative, both to how space is conceived and recognized in a city, and how the forms of its normality might be reinterpreted when slightly divergent. For one, she has perfected the art of seamless installation with that of the institutional curation. Akin to that which artist Ayşe Erkmen prompted with her piece *9'04"* at the 2019 show *Whitish*, one of the inaugural exhibitions at the new Arter museum in which one of the interior walls of the museum moves, almost imperceptibly.

The piece, *Passage* (2020), for example, provided little reason to house security at YKKS, as one uninformed worker simply did not imagine that emergency LED lighting, illuminating the corridor around the main gallery space, might be considered art, or any order of cultural expression outside of its mere utility. The grey-hued, eerie setting that it conveys instills a parallel to that which ensues outside in the intersection on Istiklal Street, where the openness cultivates visibility, however, just nearby, the alleys of Taksim are dark as a mystery.

The playful attitude was executed by an earlier show at YKKS, by the elder trickster artist, Halil Altındere, whose hyperreal wax figures in the 2019 show *AbraKadabra* were modeled after security guards tasked with watching over inanimate versions of themselves. When art assumes and infiltrates the serious, workaday pose of the overarching business sector that would look down on its intellectual remove as decorative or entirely irrelevant, the result of portraying the conversation of mutual disdain can make for effective satire. *Meydan*, however, is not as didactic or representational and, instead, frees interpretation from all objectification.

In technical terms, there are seven pieces at *Meydan*. They could be described as mostly having derived from industrial installation objects, but also include performances in collaboration with various artist colleagues. Yet, on entering the second exhibition gallery at YKKS, the atmosphere is absolutely quiet, motionless. Together, the pieces could be compared to the relationship of the thought of a writer, with their words engraved in stone. The ideational phenomena of semi-permanence, as record, is cathartic when considering urban flux.

Especially the pieces *Line* (2020), *Reflector* (2020) and *Step* (2020) maintain a symmetrical geometry of right angles. While they might be comprehensible, accommodating to the rational thinker, their placement, seemingly at random on a wall, proceeds to the entrance and confuses with cognitive dissonance. Its simplicity is slanted in the hard but dim light, enigmatic and

perplexing. Simultaneously, the noxious aesthetic of *Scum* (2020) mixed with *Passage* (2020) is familiar, yet, as art, both are disconcerting and satisfying, like punk music.

During the 16th Istanbul Biennial last year, American artist Glenn Ligon screened videos out of a mansion on Büyükada Island, *Taksim I & II*, observing the storied square, set to experimental music. They piqued interest in relation to the history of James Baldwin, yet on their own, were arguably dull, nothing more than projections of the meaningless hodgepodge that is Istanbul's complicated embrace and repulsion of its and the world's human diversity. *Meydan* does not apologize. It shows what space becomes when there is no space left.

October 30, 12:39 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Youth

When an exhibition series is older than the artists it shows, that is a good sign for the local contemporary art scene. It means that there is a sense of tradition, not only in the veins of creative work but also in the heart that supports their regular pulse, toward a shared, living body of cultural expression. However, it is equally the curation of such exhibitions that delight in the spatial experience of novelty, an intervention of impractical invention, as it were, into the public domains of normalcy through repetition.

In his curatorial statement, T. Melih Görgün defends the role of art as an integral piece of the puzzle that is human existence, from its humdrum commercial realms to the volatile emotional force of the mind. As he wrote, “the concept of artistic production,” he proclaimed, “is now a necessary component for organizing life.” And then, the curator looked toward history, referencing the Situationists of Paris who, in 1968, had premonitions of the primacy of the image above text, and even direct perception, to the world order.

The ground splits and cracks where a mock earthquake rupture splays into a series of fragmented travertine, emitting light out of its lines of emptiness. It could very well be the model of a prehistoric, geological formation, as of the earth and its self-destructive tendencies. The piece, *Rah*, a sculpture by Furkan Depeli, teases out the underlying fears over which Istanbul lives out its every breath, wondering when, where and how the tremor will occur along the fault line under the Sea of Marmara.

In contrast to the material qualities of Depeli’s sculpture, the hard yet breakable earth stands fragily, while the stiffly unmoving tower of one hundred and eighteen compressed paper wads is held up with iron wire, fashioned out of the refuse of convenient consumerism. The installation, *Monolith for the Uncontrollable*, by Abdulvahap Uzunbay is an impressive construction, demonstrating the compact, transformability of perishable, consumer media. It towers from floor to ceiling, striping the spare interior of Akbank with the varicolored mark of recycled trash.

Beside the metal detectors set inside the doorway at Akbank Sanat at the end of Istiklal Street close to Taksim Square, a subtle and innocuous video by Delal Eken plays its eleven-plus-minute duration over and over. The materials are listed in its name, *Light and Waste*. And it presents the familiar metal garbage containers on the streets of Istanbul, only lit from within with Christmasy shimmers of neon lighting. A man on a motorbike rides past, looking into its strange effervescence of color with a curious glance. The dual effect of works by Uzunbay and Eken set an initial tone that is reminiscent of the lotus flower, as a spiritual metaphor for high, sunlit beauty emerging from the depths of underwater mud. The first hall, as curated by Görgün is decidedly raw in its visual aesthetic, evading all sense of symmetry, or anything that might approximate beauty to the eye. A sound installation by Diren Demir further patrols the perceptual round. *Beyond the Wall* relays the ambiance of a city playground, as children yell amid a pacific hum of birdcall and waving trees.

Yet, the palatability of the visible field shifts into the adjacent room where a piece by Elif Özen, *Facing Off*, is displayed. It is a mixed media work of twenty-eight separate pieces collaged into one image of a curtained room. The hyperreality of its representation takes on a photographic dimension where each of the frames is divided into rectangular nodes. And its use of shadows captures and conveys the seductive enticement to look at what is unseen or uneasily seen from outside, particularly when set to a private, formal context of chairs, beds and curtains. There is a consistent theme of disintegration throughout the show, curated according to Görgün's vision to collect the pieces that have emerged from entirely different universes of personal expression into a fabrication of culture or a unified experience. The work of Özen takes on a special meaning when placed beside a like-minded piece by Engin Konuklu, *The Road*, comprising of nine pieces of acrylic on paper. There is a juxtaposition between the natural realism of Konuklu's painting and its installation, hanging like photographic prints.

For her first off-campus exhibition, the artist and writer Rana Kelleci created a work that bears resemblance to the installations of Özen and Konuklu. Yet, her piece *Repost* touched on themes of critical, social importance. Without words, she questioned the ways in which popular media exploits the public imagination. Her durational performance documented her painstaking efforts to develop an artistic practice, examining the objectification and transmutation of refugees as dehumanized and stereotyped into consumable instants of mass victimization.

According to the amount of time that people in Turkey spend on social media, Kelleci spent hours a day bent over her phone tracing the lines of faces and bodies pictured and shared from refugee camps, migrant routes and the policed borders of the world. Her work comprises well over a hundred pieces of paper, lightly penciled with the unremembered traces of newsworthy and shareable grief, of unspeakable horror and systemic shame, reduced to a colorless surface of faded markings, distant and incomplete, cold as the metal and plastic of her smartphone. Kelleci, who also writes for Istanbul art magazines, has a careful eye for the emotional potency of theoretical artwork. Like all of the artists at the *38th Contemporary Artists Prize Exhibition* at Akbank Sanat, her art education informs her work. One of her professors at Sabancı University, artist Selim Birsal, also exhibits his pieces in Istanbul's contemporary art scene, prompting flexible pedagogical hierarchies out of the public appreciation of their artwork.

An evocative parallel to the installation of Kelleci may be found in a video work by Yunus Tilen, *Immersion*. It is a heart-wrenching satire on the impersonal horrors of media-powered objectivity. Over a news clip reading, "Endangered baby dolphin dies after swimmers pass it around for selfies," Tilen paints over the published photograph of the helpless creature, held up by a swarm of people smiling at the beach. The artist rehashes the dolphin into an angelic martyr, a baby crowned in gold and enveloped in a cloud-white wrap.

November 6, 3:54 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Earthly

There is something endearing about an artist whose work appears indifferent to history and criticism. It was a stance that Mark Rothko took, for example, while promoting the redefinition of painting and its appreciation. The nonconformist iconoclast did not identify as an abstract expressionist or a craftsman of color-field canvases, yet his unmistakable signature arguably fits into their canons.

Like the sensual transcendence of interpretation that American writer Susan Sontag famously defended, Rothko idealized the immediate emotional impact that his pieces might provoke. It was only the moment of direct perception that mattered. All else was beside the point of creation, irrelevant to its original bang. Ekin Kano, born in 1990 in Istanbul, has followed through with such an intuitive, subconscious course of inquiry by means of paint.

Kano steeped herself in academic research from Turkey to the Netherlands in the departments of photography, video, visual art and communication design, focusing on topics ranging from anthropocentrism to evolution and national history. It shows up in the work through the chimeric mists of her visions. One particularly evocative painting is of a dark forest floor that opens out to an architectural vault of thin, limbless tree trunks.

The piece is one of the smaller works in her show *Damp Earth*. Its painting style is impressive in its simplicity, reflecting something of the experience of its inspiration as the creative act of its art more than its manifestation as a decorative picture hanging on the wall of the rough, concrete, white cube gallery. What begins with an opaque, lightless ground opens to the ethereal faintness of arboreal shapes dissolving into a distant, outward interiority.

In the spring of 2018, multidisciplinary artist Tufan Baltalar showed a series of similarly-sized paintings at the Pilot Gallery in Cihangir neighborhood. The show, *Surrounded By*, also had an ecological motif and, like Kano's, was imbued with an emotionality under the surface of its figurative relay. Each of Baltalar's thirty paintings of varying, fictive, unpeopled island landscapes expressed human emotional states through subliminal, interpretive gestures.

At more of a remove, Kano teased out the feeling of shapes foregrounded ahead of mute, subdued colors. The effect is that of fog or blur, pointing to that which is unseen using visibility as a metaphor. In days of government-imposed isolation and its triggering of worldwide deadlock, urban flight and existential dread, there has never been a more apt response than to return to the heart of nature, where materiality is aerated of its realism.

On the second floor of Öktem Aykut, a boutique gallery in Şişhane not far from Istanbul's core art institutions of Istanbul Modern, Pera Museum and Salt in the Beyoğlu district, another female artist born in 1990, Larissa Araz, presents a solo show, also touching on an earthly theme, with a more worldly, personal face, however. That is not to say that they are comparable by some measure of quality, as each show is curated with a naive, raw singularity all its own.

A full portrait of Gökçeada is posted on the cold, unfinished stone wall. Through its atmospheric mist and geometric framing, it bears an uncanny resemblance to certain works by Kano, whose sculptural forms merge the mineral and the vegetal in ways related to that crafted by Bora Başkan for his show at Öktem Aykut, shown prior to Kano and Araz. Where the Marmara flows into the Aegean, Gökçeada surfaces out of its inhabitants.

A cloud cluster of black-and-white photographs hangs on an adjacent wall. They form the shape of the island, as seen on the horizon. Its sloping hills peak at a silvery silhouette of the land's heights, merging with the tranquil surface of the sea's water, still but for soft ripples that, like natural time, seem to have no beginning and no end. Other aspects of the landscape are lit by hazy effulgences of light dappling a goat, an abandoned stone house and an empty field.

As part of her show *Words Don't Come Easy*, Araz photographed touching portraits of two sisters living on the island. One young woman's face is darkened, almost black around the eyes but for a faint opening in the windows of her old soul. She is long-haired, breathing with a wildness that complements the remote vision of bucolic life. Another figure often stands at a distance. She is on a sandy path, looking out into the unknown under a sheer, pale sky.

There are a series of paintings in *Damp Earth* that exercise subtle modes of perception as concerns the essence of materiality in nature. Its shapeshifting, transformative qualities are given special depth in her more abstract pictures. There is an accompanying sculptural piece that grounds their strange, eccentric lure. Like stones in shells and mycological anemones, Kano has conveyed a mythopoetic order of being.

The inventive potential of evolutionary momentum also inspired the likeminded artist C.M. Kösemen, whose show *Sanctuary* in the winter of early 2018 was based on close, passionate entomological observations. Yet Kano has an oblique, less representational mind than that ruled by fictional authorship. Her creativity dreams in skies, seas and lands, toward intimacy with the loss and nostalgia of creation, similarly captured by the photographs of Araz.

November 12, 10:01 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Recollection

It is not the first time the Dr. Markus Arts and Culture Association, housed in Schneidertempel, presented an exhibition of vintage postcards. As one of the best-preserved synagogues in Istanbul's Galata neighborhood, the space is a boon for historical exhibitions on such site-specific subjects. In late 2017, the postcards of Turkish collector Seyhun Binzet were on display, relaying snippets of fin de siècle Levantine life.

The current show, titled *Jamim Mikedem*, a variation of the Hebrew transliteration for "Past Times," features countless examples of architecture and portraiture from the nostalgic, bygone world of European Jewry. By the clear mezuzah (a piece of parchment contained in a decorative case and inscribed with specific Hebrew verses from the Torah) at the doorway of Schneidertempel, where Ottoman Ashkenazi tailors prayed for generations, the walls of the spacious, hallowed interior are furnished with framed sets of postcards.

In various incarnations, *Jamim Mikedem* traveled throughout Europe, went to New York, and has designs for Jerusalem after Istanbul. Its Turkish adaptation includes a bilingual book with texts by Czech intellectuals, including the collector. Jiri Cesticky of the Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Istanbul reflected on the timeliness of the show as the eightieth anniversary of the infamous deportations to Theresienstadt ghetto in Nazi-occupied Prague approaches.

Cesticky noted the authenticity of Central European Jewish life communicated by the images on the postcards. A century ago, the Yiddish language and the secular culture of its speakers and their extended kin influenced and spanned the lives of over eighty thousand people in historical Czech lands Bohemia and Moravia. The catalog's publisher, Judaica.cz, printed only a few selections from the curation by Banyais himself on the walls of Schneidertempel.

The synagogue facades, like those captured in towns of Meissen and Pribram in 1912, recall Babylonian, neoclassical and Gothic motifs. The steepled, Moorish-layered brick design of a synagogue in the Moravian town of Olomouc stands out in 1915 against an otherwise bleak, early industrial cityscape. The interiors of Bohemian synagogues are as dazzling, or all the more so, as their frontal depiction, with expansive archways and circular symmetries.

What is so special about Jewish culture in Central Europe, especially in Prague, was its practically seamless degree of integration with the liberal European multiculturalism of the day. Theresienstadt, for example, is famous for having interned composers who continued writing new, avant-garde and microtonal music during the Nazi occupation. While many postcards collected by Banyais have a religious tone, some show a more progressive bent.

Illustrated pictures especially were representative of more middle- to upper-class personas and activities. A man in a top hat and cane stands before an elaborate stone building, a museum or a government institution. The Hebrew characters beneath his shiny, leather boots indicate that the

man is of the Jewish world, bearded and broad-faced. Another scene is of a crowd of men in black robes and suits, most bearded, enjoying a woman's onstage dancing.

A diptych of a lower-middle-class sort, not too old, but certainly not young, and bearded with a skullcap, spends his days bent over writing paper and nights gambling cards. The Hebrew captions spell out Yiddish phrases, a transliterated version of German. Yet another characterful scene shows an older woman shooing a man outside with a broom, as the house behind her is filled with violinists. The imagination runs wild.

The Turkish publication of *Jamim Mikedem* is invaluable for the translation of an essay by Hebraist scholar Bedrich Nosek known for his 1999 book, *Jewish Prague*. In his text, Nosek asks pertinent questions. "The postcards exhibited in this exhibition depict the life of communities which in the main have long disappeared, or which at least have lost their original significance. But is the European Jewish Diaspora really an unrecoverable past?"

In the practically compulsive urge to reclaim lost history, investigating the Jewish past includes a whirlpool of influences that span global geography, obscure eras, religious origins and intellectual movements. Europe and its connection to the Levant, a road that has traditionally encompassed routes of pilgrimage and migration through Turkey, are the source of previously unknown nexuses of peoples and cultures.

The postcard appeared at a point when international travel, prompted by technological advances in rail and steam, coincided with the advent of photography. It was a common and entertaining pastime, that, not unlike social media today, complemented earlier forms of letter writing with that of images. In other words, people communicated through pictures on postcards. While people today may not know why a particular piece was mailed, the image still speaks for itself.

In 1906, Jerusalemska Street in Prague was lively with the hum of public society. People congregated on the steps of the Jubilee Synagogue, which had an exquisite facade integrating various aesthetic principles, evoking the alchemical marriage of East and West with its archways, columns and patterns. On its steps, Prague's citizenry rested and enjoyed conversations about the latest salons and theaters from Moscow to Paris, Vienna to Berlin.

One postcard, dated to the last day of the century, on Dec. 30, 1899, illustrates the snowy nonchalance of Prague on the cusp of that paradigmatic shift in modern consciousness which led the heady aspirations of post-imperial national awakening into the dizzying tragedies of twentieth-century dystopia. Yet, in a moment, the frozen frame of men leaning on their canes under the stars as women walk past, dressed elegantly, is quaint and fresh.

Nosek expresses an extraordinary degree of optimism in his appreciation of Jewish life in Europe, retrospectively. He writes: "Periods of utter desperation alternate with joyful expectations for the future, which is why Rabbinic tradition compares the people of Israel to the

moon: just as the moon waxes and wanes, so the history of the Jewish nation is marked by alternating growth and decline.”

“Perhaps sometime in the future, a new Jewish community will once again blossom in Europe and continue with the thousand-year legacy of past generations.”

There is one postcard, taken in 1938, when the world was in the thralls of Nazism, of a man and his son on their way to temple. The photograph shows the heavy countenance of a poor, rural Jew, looking one way while his boy, holding his hand, leads him out of the picture.

Banyais' words, translated by Stephen Hattersley for the Schneidertempel show's book, evoke sincerity. "I would like to share the beauty of Jewish postcards with the public and to revive those long-ago days. I hope to recreate the atmosphere of the period of 80-100 years ago with photographs of ghettos, portraits and photographs of people, and paintings and drawings of Jews in prayer, at work, during festivals and at weddings."

November 16, 5:07 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Hush

There is a similitude between sound and sculpture, particularly in terms of their appreciation, when exhibited as contemporary art. The projection of sound is not visually demanding, and so by its mere presence, it provokes a confrontation between what is sensed and not sensed, and what is interpreted, both by an individual previously unaware of its existence and by the artist and his curatorial team who were thinking of the creative process and presentational contexts of the piece for a substantial period of time prior to its public exhibition.

With a mere superficial gaze, simply by lending an ear, the latest artwork on display by the sound installation artist and academician Selçuk Artut is an opaque horror show with the ambiance of stir-crazy creativity, confined to the reflexive interpretations of its own incomprehensible, inner world. At first impressions, it does not bear the erudite sophistication of its author. There is a mass of explanatory text on the wall before the main hall's installation. A reflective, digital enumeration counts down the seconds, and then it begins.

One hears the machine whirr of the piece, a configuration of nine poles that, like stalactites and stalagmites in a cave, emerge from the floor and ceiling. The slow, automated movements of the protruding metal cylinders, extending from rectangular black bases, as box-like foundations, further invite the mind into a sculptural setting. Yet, Artut is an artist of sound, and so that is the focus of his creation. In short, the piece is a garbled spread of spatial dissonance. The evocation is that of raspy voices, struggling to enunciate a vowel, yet their mouths are full of dry air.

As a pedagogue of voice and interaction at Sabancı University, where he runs the Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design program, Artut is steeped in the nature of sonic phenomena. With his installation, *If These Walls Could Hush*, he has innovated an environment in which the primacy of sound engages in a peculiar course of dialogue with its mechanical source. It is comparable to a voice, that, purely itself, attempts to break through the complexity of the body and project its self-expression, yet is utterly obstructed by inhuman acoustical rendering.

Artut is active in the studio and on stage with at least two projects. Since 1998, he has been a part of the post-rock avant-garde band Replikas. One of their most popular compositions, titled *Yaş Elli* (loosely translated as "Age Fifty"), revolves at a deliberate pace around a rhythm weighed by an elastic drum kit playing to the traditional Turkish *zurna*, a rustic woodwind. And more recently, with collaborator Alp Tuğan, Artut has led wavelengths as part of the performance group RAW, whose shows integrate audio and visual elements via live coding. An aesthetic line can be drawn between the sculptural audio installation of Artut and that of Cevdet Erek, particularly the reincarnation of his piece, *Bergama Stereo*, at Arter. Both artists demand a full-scale research agenda in order to adequately apprehend the sense of direction they engender through their sound works. Erek referenced Berlin nightclub music and Turkish *davul* drumming. Artut's choice for the sculptural shape from which his sounds issue is reminiscent of the historic, renovated domestic architecture of Istanbul that inspired Erek.



Yet, these observations hover around and pass through the emanation of sound that centers Artut's installation. It is, in that sense, a reflection of the experience of his work, as a body moves in relation, immersed in an acoustic setting. If the immediacy and penetrability of Artut's curated projection is an indication of its experience, it is possible to speak of its personal effects. For example, the compromised quality of the sound, its vague harshness, commingles with the darkness of the gallery hall, triggering repulsion, even disgust.

*If These Walls Could Hush* has a serpentine, slithering, whispery character. If it were made of light, it might strobe, flicker and dim with an erratic multivalence. The overlapping of inarticulate voices spans temperaments that are at once low while touching the surface of human utterance, transforming into something hybrid, not exactly anthropocentric but both animal and machine. Artut intended to convey silence, an abstraction that, like right angles, does not exist in nature, but as a fantasy, born of the mysterious human capacity to grasp at absolutes.

In his conceptual text published by Zilberman Gallery to accompany the otherwise materially austere exhibition, Artut muses on the interrelationships between sound and the contrasts of its emergence in interior and exterior space. He makes reference to certain metaphors to describe sound and its absence in terms of psychological states, such as an invisible curtain. Unlike painting, or even sculpture and visual arts in general, sound art does not fall into the same theoretical categories of objective and subjective definition. Artut wrote with symbolic potency:

Our lives are surrounded by walls. Even though we try to bury and hide all our secret experiences under a tree they sprout and come out into the sun. Yet walls do not want to hide anything. They have peculiar colors, smells, textures, as well as sounds, although we think they will never hear them. It might be that they are not struggling to be heard but actually, walls do have a language. And the good thing is, they never lie. They do not try to hide from anyone what is happening, all the treachery and the wrath.

Zilberman Gallery redesigned the interior of its main curatorial space for Artut's installation and it would seem that the artist has used sound to draw the attention of listeners not to the resonance itself, but to the way that the sound is related to its medium, that being the bulky valves employed to give sculptural shape to his piece. Moreover, his is a nonverbal, aural comment on gallery acoustics and their influence on thought and perception. *If These Walls Could Hush* can be heard as an exaggerated gesture of reflexive and institutional criticism. It is not an easy search to discover the origins of the phrase "if these walls could talk," presumably the derivation of Artut's fifth solo exhibition title at Zilberman. The idea of their hushing, however, has the connotation of the walls not merely having a voice and using it, but that of asking whoever or whatever might be between them to quiet down, even to be silent. By definition, walls have an effect on sound. They reflect and absorb vibrations recognized by auditory vestibular nerves in the brain. They are the silence that creates sound.

November 26, 9:53 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Transparency

The advancement of technology and its integration with the art world are a trending topic in 2020. Though, the linear progression of modern innovation, via the power of human sight and the instruments that magnify it with hyperreal precision, is still subject to questioning in both science and art. Whereas the intellectual theory of historical and evolutionary cyclicity holds sway with the approach of quantum dynamics in popular knowledge and cultural activity, its demonstration, by more traditional means, such as painting remains a rarefied endeavor.

As a seasoned painter whose prolific oeuvre of canvases appears to span lifetimes of honed and diversified practice, Karin Kneffel consummates bold experiments in the picturing of ideational beauty with singular finesse. Her latest series of untitled paintings, all produced entirely within the year, are titled with a conceptual bent, as *Haymatlos*, a complex term that indicates statelessness, both metaphysically and by immediate experience. Kneffel conveys a psychological condition, peculiarly emotive, with nothing more than oil paint.

If photography is arguably considered to be a more accurate depiction of sensed reality and thereby is generally seen as a more advanced tool than the traditional mode of paint to generate representational images, Kneffel has painted a convincing rebuttal. Yet, her works explore further. They also demonstrate the unique capacity of creative painting (as her craft might be called, like "creative writing," in lieu of the overused "art" of painting), to penetrate into the essence of seeing.

Through aesthetically exquisite oils, *Haymatlos* intently contextualizes the all-absorbing faculty of vision as a subjective act more representative of the mind than of the normative objectification of the world. Kneffel points to abstract notions of truth by quite earthly means, parallel to her reimagined landscapes and still lives. At the same time that *Haymatlos* could be interpreted as a disembodied form of statelessness, she points to its relevance between the lands of Germany and Istanbul, with nods to leading modernist thinkers in Western history.

As curated, the expansive, lofty interior of Dirimart begins with a single painting suspended on a wall. Its placement demands full attention, blocking every view but for passages on either side. The tone of the exhibition is introduced by a single, prefatory work. The piece chosen to open the spatial reference of *Haymatlos* bears visual motifs that recur throughout the show, that of water bubbles floating, as in defiance of gravity, but more, like condensation on the surface of a window.

The idea of transparency enjoys curious, persistent fascination where art theory and contemporary philosophy intersect. The sense of clarity or lack thereof is a function and quality of seeing, not merely as an act, but as the result of its action. Kneffel's paintings explore these modes of inquiry with playful tact. Opposite the initially curated piece, through the contiguous halls that stretch toward the back of the Dolapdere warehouse space that is Dirimart, a canvas by Kneffel reads, "I am not a kitchen!"

The kitchen piece, as it might be referred to informally while remaining untitled, is an evocation of the Frankfurt Kitchen design of German emigre Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky. Kneffel uses the model, symbolic of *Haymatlos*, to juxtapose various, cognitively dissonant varieties of perspective. For one, the statement, lathered in vibrant cobalt blue paint, despite being text, leaps forward out of the unfocused image behind it, of a pale, unfocused figure sitting at a kitchen table. The gray scene lacks realness against the letters that cast shadows.

Dirimart has the sleek architectural approachability of a New York neighborhood gallery, yet with the spacious openness of a European museum floor, with its long, thin ceiling lights beaming down to illuminate such shows as the recent, fellow Düsseldorf artist Candida Höfer. In contrast to the glaring broad daylight and hospital lighting of a Höfer capture, Kneffel has mined the profound reach of the painting to touch on the intimacy of sight, where the sensing act itself subtly influences that which is seen.

The kitchen piece that concludes the spatial course of *Haymatlos* seems to be part of a diptych beside another work of a domestic scene, only overlain with the textural paint smear of a crimson red “X”. And hovering over its frame within a frame are webs of shade, perhaps reflected from the outdoors, or as they might have fallen within the artist's studio while painting. The smear reappears, like an unfinished work in the shape of a right angle, over her study of the sculptor Rudolf Belling's monumental sculpture of Ismet İnönü, Turkey's second president. Kneffel has painted the sculpture looking up from below, gazing simultaneously at a dramatic, cloudy sky of deep azures tinged and burning with a greenish orange horizon. She also painted Belling himself in the middle of sculpting the piece, which he worked on after having fled Germany in 1937.

A year later, the first female Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky was also in Istanbul, reuniting with exiled German architect Bruno Taut. Together with Schütte-Lihotzky, Taut and Belling, *Haymatlos* pays a deserving homage to Erich Auerbach, who wrote his grand opus, *Mimesis* in Istanbul among fellow German exiles during World War II, establishing the academic discipline of comparative literature. Many of the paintings that Kneffel conceived for *Haymatlos* conjure Bosphorus landscapes that these towering, yet displaced thinkers would have been seeing as they set into motion some of the most influential momentums of modern scholarship, design and art.

It is, in a certain way, full of contradictions, to realize that these sagacious exiles were simultaneously reconstructing the world that they had come from and were losing to barbarism and demagoguery. Despite forced emigration, the ingenuities they developed while in Istanbul remain canonical to the cultural legacy of the twentieth century. Kneffel, through multilayered works painted with a scintillating grasp of light and angle, affirms the power of seeing from different places, or even placelessly, as a transformational act of self-awareness.

December 2, 4:58 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Wonder

They have no names, but they do have very peculiar faces. And there are no words to identify where they might be standing, going to or coming from. It is the universe of an Özkan Gencer painting that floats through in nebulous, cloud-like wisps, each piece set to a particular color for the backdrop of human scenes that at once familiar and even mundane, become utterly ethereal when seen closely.

Orange bears an uncanny resemblance to the generally Caucasian skin tones and physiological features of the figures that Gencer paints with childlike naivety. Their proportions are somehow a little off, albeit with a touch of conscious intent, bent and transmuted by their being pictured. A man with a broom appears uniformed in a mute blue suit, sweeping a pile of letters out of sight, beyond the corner of the canvas.

The motif of the letter recurs in the oils of Gencer. It is a kernel of a metaphor, holding unrealized, or mysterious, power as a symbol of the possibility of the future or of a connection to the past. Beside him, a woman in a pinstripe dress clenches an envelope in her left palm, while looking over the shoulders of two children, a boy and a girl, both dressed as travelers. Under a top hat, the boy is visibly worried, grasping the handle of his suitcase tightly.

The girl beside him wears an orange shift. The hue is doused through her hair, and yet, she does not blend in with the orange color of the background. Hers is a vibrant variety of dye, accented as distinct from her swirling environment. It would seem that it is not those who are on the move who are actually moving but the world around them. The woman, ostensibly the mother, looks in the opposite direction of the street cleaner. Perhaps it is, or was, her husband.

Behind them, in the distance for their smallness, the hood and roof of a small car serve as the stage for two musicians. Atop its round, Volkswagen-like exterior, a man plays the reeded *zurna*, a folk woodwind from Anatolia. His shirt is orange. Yet, the similitude between the color of the man's clothes and the background against which he is seen is not at odds because Gencer has carefully conceived his characteristic human shape, like clay.

Behind him, a *davul* drummer knocks at his portable bass drum with a traditional club. The music could be for a wedding or a ceremonial rural celebration of that order. They are the traveling folk band who reappear in Gencer's paintings, retaining humor that is not unlike the Mariachis of Mexico, who by a global comparison are always suited and ready to go next to their broken-down car, awaiting an impromptu invite from a party of passersby.

Yet, the painting, which spans 160-centimeters in height and 120-centimeters in width at Asmalimescit Art Gallery as part of the show *Unchain My Heart* by Gencer, has a soft, rainy-day nostalgia to it. Like a memory that passes unexpectedly and provokes an emotional reckoning with a long-lost beloved, or a family trauma. The house behind all of the people in the scene of that painting is empty, and by its windows, humanoid chickens fly.

In that way, Gencer deserves comparison to the surrealist Russian-Jewish painter Marc Chagall, whose unmistakable visual craft relayed his special cultural remembrance through calligraphic Yiddish and Ashkenazi pastoralism in the heady days of early twentieth-century, interwar Paris. It is with a parallel refrain that Gencer sees himself as a nonpareil artist, cast into eternity by his signature style.

But it was all the way back in the days when Chagall was painting easels in Montparnasse a century ago when the idea of absolute distinctiveness came into confrontation with the principles of modernism in new art, to a large degree in response to the demands of industrial life. Following World War II, artist Yves Klein exhibited the same painting for different prices, while Marcel Duchamp's readymades were meant to be replaceable.

These are just two examples of how Gencer by content and context exemplifies an anachronism in art history, yet his naivety is endearing, and what has emerged are touches of a collective consciousness with not only the artist's past but with earlier rumblings of introspective creativity that would lead to the mainstream prioritization of the artist, especially their individuality, as glamorously more important than the artworks themselves.

On his fictive planet, everything happens in a Gencer painting. Yet, it is a closed society, something of a Black Sea village resonance, and the people he portrays are on the edge of the canvas, always peering out into the invisible, the immaterial. It could be interpreted as the artist, himself only peripherally aware of the advances in the art world around him, yet who steadfastly remains still within his practice, sheltered by the cocoons of his egoistic renderings.

In the painting for *Unchain My Heart*, with the orange background, distance is equally indicative of lengths of space and time. And it is also among the qualities of the old-fashioned, handwritten snail mail letter, where spatial and temporal gaps are implied. Yet, a letter includes both connection and remoteness. It is like a painting, or artwork, as defined by images, where images are the likenesses of what is ultimately real.

I wrote about the paintings of Gencer in 2017 when I lived in Kuzguncuk and was quite fresh to life in Istanbul. I was also new at writing about art. As I sit and write about his paintings again, three years later, having gained a wide breadth of perspectives on art in Turkey and abroad, I am somehow no less fixated on the works that drew me in the first time. An orange-bearded man in a wheelchair, holding an espresso, overlooking amorphous scenery.

There is a curious dynamic between the figures of men and women in the paintings of Gencer. In the canvas where the coffee-drinking fellow sits, one leg over the other, his thin nose and sharp eyes deepened by his small bifocals, there is a doorway, normally to a house, but to Gencer it is just a doorway. Two of the feminine figures carry infants. And atop the mantle of the doorframe, a man is playing the zurna. It is reminiscent of the opening of *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971).

And while Gencer does not demonstrate mastery of skill with the paintbrush, or even an entirely original command of his visual vocabulary, there is an earnestness to his works, and a sincerity, grown out of the soil from which he has stepped, breathed, imagined and painted. *Unchain My Heart* mostly spans Gencer's last decade at work, yet the body of paintings that he has made throughout his quite lengthy career, this being his seventh solo show, could be seen as one grandiose approach to the creative act of remembering, one brushstroke at a time.

December 9, 12:23 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Circular

Minimality has a profound effect within broader, societal contexts suffused with varieties of materialistic overstimulation. That is the potency of *Repetition* at Arter in a quarter of Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, a show spotlighting the ceramic ingenuity of Alev Ebüzziya Siesbye. In spare sets, the bowls of Siesbye sit atop colorless, sharply rectangular pedestals, and along a shelf neatly carved with right angles and straight lines into a wall, backlit like artifacts at an archaeological museum. The air is wholly contemporary, fresh with the long, deliberate life of the artist.

In her eighth decade, Siesbye is a cultural treasure for Turkey, where she attended sculpture courses at the Istanbul State Academy of Fine Arts from 1956 to 1958. After a career between the European cities of Copenhagen and Paris, developing her ceramic craft in commercial and artistic fields, the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum celebrated her life's work with a retrospective in 2002, encompassing pieces that she had been producing since 1964. Her first solo show was in Copenhagen in 1971, at the Galerie Birkdam.

Fifty years later, Arter poses the singularity of her craft anew. The curation of Eda Berkmen, known for her careful treatment of such twentieth-century Turkish artists as Nil Yalter, who, coincidentally, was also born in 1938, later working in Paris decades prior and concurrently with Siesbye. In contrast to Yalter, whose multidisciplinary artistry spanned and transcended the bounds of genre and medium, Siesbye had steadfastly honed her meditative practice to a fine point, or for a more appropriate metaphor, to a circular curve.

The bowls of Siesbye provoke an immersive suspension of temporality. To see and walk among them is to bask in the resplendence of ample time, as their bodies mirror the spiraling passage of the ascending and descending sun, as the Earth rotates clockwise and counterclockwise with immeasurable three-dimensionality. The gallery in which *Repetition* is exhibited at Arter has an ameliorating silence. In curatorial texts, Siesbye's bowls relate to the bronze of Assyrian ritual, Himalayan singing bowls, Buddhist and Christian temple bells.

Further entranced by the delicacy of her touch, Siesbye sought to minimize the size, shape and colors of her work to an unprecedented degree, crafting the pieces exhibited at Arter exclusively for the show in 2019. In musicological terms, the Berlin-based composer, producer and performer Nils Frahm exercises a similarly inventive restraint, mixing subtle tinges of organic and electronic innovation. A kindred creative, Siesbye nuances decorative pieces into the realm of critical artwork.

It is peculiar to the human experience not merely to use tools, such as a ceramic vessel, for their functionality, but to focus on their form, firstly, as the prime cause and purpose for their original creation and ultimate end. Arguably, that is the underlying property that instills the bowls of Siesbye with their supernatural quality. In her words, Siesbye drew inspiration from a Sung

Dynasty horse and monumental Mesopotamian figures, the Sphinx, Archaic Kouros and early Anatolian statues, Hittite reliefs and, as she explained, "endless blue seas."

In the archaeological record, ceramic bowls evidence some of the earliest examples of technological and cultural advancement, going back before the Neolithic era. It affirms the cyclicity of the prehistorical imagination into modernity that their craft remains at the center of human culture. In the months following the first anniversary of Arter's inaugural reopening in its Dolapdere space as Istanbul's flagship contemporary art museum, the warmly inviting, earthen bowls of Siesbye are a welcome addition to an otherwise abstract art world of theoretical dematerialization.

At the same time, Siesbye's approachable bowls are no less erudite or conjectural than even the most puzzling of nonrepresentational installations. *Repetition* is inspired by a philosophical novel by the same name, written by Danish polymath Soren Kierkegaard. As a longtime resident of Denmark, Siesbye is apparently steeped in the nation's canons of thought, including their often infamously bleak outlook. It is complementary to the patience she had to endure to make her latest series of bowls, with painstaking attention to the slightest deviations.

In an unpublished book Kierkegaard wrote before *Repetition*, titled *Johannes Climacus*, he asserted, "When ideality and reality touch each other then repetition appears." As a student of Socrates, Kierkegaard was exposed to the ancient notion of ideas as constants in nature, where a concept like "repetition" would be considered a veritable glitch in the matrix, a sign from the deities, no less the ability to imagine it alongside the related fancies of eternity, love, fame and wealth.

To his Danish mind, Kierkegaard saw a dash of divinity in the thought of repetition and likened it to meditation, only with more Scandinavian authenticity. Siesbye manifests the meditative principle of repetition in her bowls, evoking the sublime apprehension of repetition as a touch from the muse, in other words, as a piece of art. Kierkegaard is considered one of the earliest existential philosophers for his embracing the sheer distinction of individuality as the foundation for a moral, free-thinking, rational and multiculturally tolerant society.

There are quite many differences between the fields of art, technology and media, while they often merge indistinguishably, particularly the latter two. Art, as a separate sector, however, has the curious potential to hold the attention of a global society driven to the brink of overburdened industrialization with utterly naive works of material invention. The artist is specially equipped with the skills to retrieve undying, otherwise archaic techniques by which to stir solitary and collective consciousness with a bold, non-dualistic harmony.

"In principle, a work of art has always been reproducible," wrote Walter Benjamin, in the seminal art criticism essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in which, like Kierkegaard, the German-Jewish intellectual unpacks modern presumptions of signature uniqueness in art, retelling the dynamic history of art in relation to mass, cultural production.



"Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."

Through color and shape alone, Siesbye has returned to the question, only with a voice light and sonorous, as a singer onstage in the middle of a piazza in Rome, recounting the fables of old with a theatrical step and a humorous tone. Her bowls resemble how early pottery changed little by little, adding a stripe at the lip, or divergence from standardized contours. As a microcosm of human remains over tens of thousands of years, the legacy of Siesbye is no less alluring. Looking at a Siesbye bowl in person, its textures can be felt by the seer's eyes.

December 16, 1:17 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Next-Wave

In the months preceding the opening of her anticipated solo show in Istanbul, artist Nazlı Gürlek Hodder posted photos of her works in process from the San Francisco Bay area, where she was working in her studio on what became the installation, *In the Body*. Hodder is also known as a curator of the fourth Mardin Biennial, among other prominent exhibitions that encompass her enduring interests in the mystic allure of Anatolia, its prehistoric lands bearing the mysteries of feminine embodiment, of Earth when it was revered as a mother goddess inspiring the earliest sculptures in the archaeological record, Venus figurines, the fertile female.

To date, the appearances of Paleolithic Venus figurines between Europe and Anatolia are separated by at least 30,000 years. The history of sculpture, and of figurative art, began when an early human, or humans, carved the very first Venus figurine on a piece of an ivory mammoth tusk in what is now Germany not more than 40,000 years ago. Interestingly, along with the representation of the female form in a functional state as reproductive life-giver, there was an anthropomorphic lion-man figurine, depicting her archetypal opposition and mate, in perhaps a more shamanistic guise, as a shapeshifter, transcendent amid earthly matters.

Hodder, in her artwork, is rewriting or reanimating the history of women, both as a personal expression, and drawing from her field studies at Anatolian sites like Çatalhöyük, where the *Seated Woman* figurine, dating back 6,000 years, was unearthed in 1961. The figurine was made during the final era of the Stone Age prior to the smelting of copper, or the Bronze Age. Whereas empirical sciences like archaeology define time according to how materials are used, Hodder, as an artist, proposes an alternate, though an equally factual realm of human experience, affirming the cyclical worldview of a proto-feministic spiritual naturalism.

There were spattered canvases, action drips smeared, red and brown, internal colors of human and planetary bodies. The canvases, unprimed, raw, resemble the thick skins of ceremonial Central Asian drums, the heart of its circular frame beaten, as by a paintbrush, enticing spirits to appear out of involuntary haunts of forgotten spells and forbidden rituals. And approaching its total manifestation in the overburdened, urban core of Istanbul, in the industrial district of Dolapdere, the effect is tantamount to the culture shock a time traveler might feel traversing the prehistoric epochs to the present day.

It begins with a papery mass, reminiscent of a cave wall, painted with ochre and seeds, natural dyes gleaned from fruits and animals. On the ground, copper metalware speaks of a passage of temporalities continuous from the dawn of humanity through the epochs. There are knotted ropes that, entangled and splayed, seem like a serpentine's course over gravelly dirt. Even the placement of sprigs of vegetation is arid and weathered. And for a stark textural contrast, silvery, reflective globes rest on a pillow. The canvases, draped, might be considered to have aesthetic parallels to the frameless, psychedelic paintings of African-American color field painter and lyrical abstractionist Sam Gilliam.

Fragments of bodily contours, cast in latex, could be seen as the remnants of a performative trace, of which Hodder is a practitioner. In 2017, she collaborated with Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations (ANAMED), during its exhibition, *The Curious Case of Çatalhöyük* and Performistanbul to produce *One*, her performance piece, which included elements also in her current show *In the Body*, such as unprimed canvas and reflective globes. *One* sought to recreate a 4,000-year-old ritual, foregrounding a woman, performed by Aslı Bostancı, whose movements evoked the revitalization of an extinct ontology.

The variety of facets, ingredients, objects and works within *In the Body* is at times unsettling, if not refreshing in its informality. It is almost like the working area of a disorderly healer who has wrestled with the chaos of the universe and comes back to the normal plane only to leave their bits and pieces of afternoon meddling astray. The show's features of ambiguity are in direct confrontation with utterly bald metaphors of the body, left hanging, exposed in the white light of the plain Evliyagil Museum in Dolapdere. Its glass storefront faces the rude awakenings of mechanized modernity: traffic, construction, pollution, overpopulation.

There were twenty-five unique pieces, all part of *In the Body*, and they adhered to a collective vocabulary that, while in conceptual relation to the excavation of prehistoric artifacts and their cultural memory, were ultimately the individual expression of Hodder. Her work, *Totem* (2020), which stands like a stack of speakers against a wall, is the effective result of a lightbox illuminating concentrically darkening circles of pale skin-toned orange oil paint on an unprimed canvas. She has carefully and quite elegantly elaborated its coloring against the backlight so as to craft lifelike lunar crescents.

The placement and framing of *Totem*, however, works against its otherworldly magic that stirs from its internal content. The final impact of the artwork is that of a mere object, plain, as it were, haphazard, as a throwaway relic worthy of archival storage. Her series *Ihtilaf* (2018), which can be translated as “disunion” or “friction” are subtle, semi-abstract configurations of bodies in motion. Her broad washes of dark acrylic paint on unprimed canvas around a circular hole in the piece, *Body is a Portal* (2020) were also accompanied by a photo of its outdoor installation surrounded by forest, on dry grassland, issued as a transparent color print.

There was a walker, a seer, who listened and absorbed the presence of the installations and works around her as she went through the spatial extent of *In the Body*, accompanied by a staff guide. At times, she smiled. It is possible that she may even have laughed, especially by the end of the show, in which the representational element of Hodder’s pieces are unmistakably evident, however metaphorical. It grows from the sculptural work of copper, ash and linseed oil on stone, *Cosmic Egg* (2020), simply a black oval-shaped sphere resting on an upturned copper pipe.

In a gesture of perspicacious self-consciousness, *In the Body* is also exhibiting a child’s drawing, *Hole* (2020), of pastels on paper by Furkan Gençtürk, who is thirteen and lives in Kurtuluş, a neighborhood traditionally home to Turkey’s Christian minorities. In Dolapdere, across from the newfangled, opulent Arter museum, there is a bitter class separation between arts professionals

and local families. Gençtürk sells water on the street by Evliyagil Museum. He walked into the opening of *In the Body* and told Hodder he liked *Body is a Portal* best, but said he could paint better. She invited him to try. He returned with his painting. His artwork is for sale beside hers.

December 24, 5:08 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Suspense

In musical terms, suspension is best known as sustain. In the narrative forms of cinema and literature, to name just two examples, concepts like disbelief are suspended in everyday usage. But in music, it is rarer to consider phenomena beyond the legato of a voice penetrating the air when thinking about the sustain of notes. From a semantic point of view, sustain would also suggest sustenance. And truly, it is a quality of music to sustain, or even nourish, the heart. Yet, what music does not do, normally speaking, is suspend.

That normality has been flipped on its head for the remount of the "Rainforest" series, following the composition of music by David Tudor in collaboration with the equally legendary American dance choreographer Merce Cunningham in 1968. In the original dance production of *Rainforest*, Cunningham himself performed alongside his company. During its creation, dancers remembered him as a forest sprite, whose unencumbered energy was unleashed onstage in the visionary movements that he inspired in his body and those around him.

The achievement of *Rainforest*, despite impressions distanced by space and time, is to inspire an ambiance of freedom – that within the peaked ecology of earthly evolution, the wings and symbioses of creation defy gravity. Cunningham choreographed unorthodox movements for his dancers, surrounded by luminous assemblages of pillows and hanging, spindly objects. The sound installations that have come out of Tudor's work as a composer continue to influence audiences today, over half a century later, and halfway around the world.

I was formerly a reviewer of performances at Joyce Theater in New York City, where *Rainforest*, and Cunningham overall, exacted a lasting, comprehensive impact on dance. It was like there was a constant shadow over the dance scene, and its silhouette was that of Cunningham in the midst of *Rainforest*, flitting to and fro, absolutely absorbed in his state of mind that could only be described as high-pitched caprice, which, like a rainforest, was strong in its independence, a world unto itself, yet at once utterly interdependent with all of life.

The capricious character of Cunningham's body onstage had a peculiar parallel with that of David Tudor offstage. In a lengthy interview, published with *Rainforest V (variation 3)*, one of the countless prolific textual accompaniments enjoined to the world-class programming at Arter, Phil Edelstein, a leading creative voice within the organization behind the compositional remount, Composers Inside Electronics Inc., remembered living and working with David Tudor in the midst of their informal brainstorming. Tudor lived a life reminiscent of his perhaps more famous contemporary, John Cage. Although Tudor was arguably the more battered soul among them, he was said to drain tincture-like medicines, gleaned from his pocket, at any given hour of the day. And he cooked, not unlike the amateur mycologist Cage, who entertained the likes of Yoko Ono with his craft of mushroom-based cuisine. Edelstein reminisced with a bittersweet tone of how Tudor was bent over a cutting board as often as he wrote music.

And it is that endearing, personable disposition that such midcentury artists as Cunningham, Cage and Tudor sought to crystallize. While to liberals and progressives their art was deemed outlandishly avant-garde, they were, in fact, speaking to a broader mass than high art had ever come to approximate, simply by venturing steadfastly on the path of individual expression or, in other words, to show the raw human presence of a face amid the highfalutin productions of the stage arts, of institutionalized culture, while reinventing itself.

Together with like-minded composer John Driscoll, Edelstein fashioned the work of Composers Inside Electronics Inc. for the world premiere of the third variation of *Rainforest V*, specially tailored for Arter's Karbon, a concert and installation space within the museum made for dynamic acoustical experiences. There are twenty found and constructed objects that hang from the tall ceiling, including large floats, plastic barrels, a copper tub, a plant pot and a badminton racquet. The more artificial objects are juxtaposed with two pieces of bamboo, which instill an otherwise naturalistic mood to the otherworldly, surreal experiment in listening. Walkers, standers, ears and eyes that move, glide and think are encouraged to change their perspective within *Rainforest V (variation 3)*, from all sides and looking down from a platform overlooking the expanse of Karbon dimly lit within its black walls, touched by gleams of reflective light that streak the floor and bounce off of the metallic objects that suspend, orbital, turning. The concept room exudes a backstage aura, like a living landscape beneath a dense forest canopy, visible only slightly, mostly heard.

There are screeches of birdcall that echo, merging with the groans of monkeys and the chitter of insects. By hearing alone, a listener is immediately enwrapped and immersed in a habitat of ideas, where sounds and objects commingle as a web of experiential mutuality. Sound has the curious capacity to affect the perception of space, and *Rainforest V (variation 3)* has a transporting power, capable of transcending the urban environs of the Dolapdere quarter outside of Arter and also the cultural context of the gallery, and of artificial creativity, toward a reflexive insight into human nature. As a student of tropical biology and the sociology of conservation during my early years in university, I undertook research in the Amazonian rainforest, in the jungles of Peru. On a boat in the middle of the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve for two weeks, days away from dry earth, entangled in protected wetlands as far as the eye could see in all directions, I was struck, foremost, by the volume of sound, its constant force and multifaceted detail, articulated from the tallest branch to the depths of the river basin that had long captured the world's imagination. And in the core of Istanbul, where the knock and grind of construction bear down throughout Taksim, the artistic nexus that Dolapdere is becoming, between Arter, Evliyagil, Dirimart and Pilevneli, a performative ecology of ideas, constructed out of the concrete of Turkish art theory, set into place by lifelong careers in the business of visualizing impractical, its essential inventiveness and intellectual industry. The world premiere of *Rainforest V (variation 3)* at Arter is a testament to the vibrance of the land and its people beneath the stone of old thoughts renewed.

December 31, 12:44 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

**2021**

## Stay

*Stay Art Home* is an exasperating play on the words, "art" and "at." As a preposition, the meaning of "at" demands context. Art also exists in direct relation to its conceptual and physical surroundings, oftentimes more acutely when temporally contextualized, hence the perennial definition of modernism. Yet, during a winter of lockdowns, devoid of commercial and cultural life beyond the confines of domestic spaces and the occasional outdoor nook, the arts persevere, for their capacity to adapt to the newness and to pervade the zeitgeist of multimedia innovation.

In Istanbul, Blue Rhino programmed its engagements with artists, curators, collectors and culturati through a mobile framework that traveled between galleries, studios and networks across Iran and Turkey, from the floors of Pera to the lofts of Tehran. Now in the U.K., while farther afield from its roots, in what might be described as the Middle Eastern north, Blue Rhino continues to make a case for the introduction of Iranian, Turkish and other fringe artists, together as a force of aesthetic and historical reinvention against Western predominance.

As a digital show of affordable artworks, *Stay Art Home* is open for virtual visitation via the interactive KunstMatrix platform. And sliding within the computerized space, a piece by the Greek artist Angeliki Papageorgiou comes into focus. It is a wash of mixed media coloration on a board canvas. The title, *La Fiesta* (2020), speaks to its pale interfusion of abstractions that, together, form a landscape of soft forms, generously open to interpretation. There is a figure somehow against a horizon, entering an opening, but everything is unsure.

Born in Volos, Greece in 1978, Papageorgiou paints beyond the markers of national identity with her own, individual style, towards holistic human expression. It is an approach that other artists within the Blue Rhino collective approximate and advance, while with their own special vocabularies and relationships to the traditions of representational technique that preceded them within their various cultural milieus. An example is the Iranian artist Mehrdad Khataei, whose work of mixed media on cardboard, *Crib* (2020) was shown at *Stay Art Home*.

There are wisps of Persian calligraphy in Khataei's work, which integrates a finely drawn figurative portrait within an otherwise unfinished sketch of a woman and a dog. Khataei hails from northwestern Iran's Tabriz and became legendary to Tehran's art scene as influenced by printmaking. And *Crib* is part of a series that ventures further into color. His use of red is striking amid bursts of scenery that emerge within the illusive optical experience of his multi-layered visions. A pair of plump men are doused in otherworldly biota, downcast, unsmiling, as bright clouds appear.

Having transplanted operations from Istanbul to London, Jam is encompassing an increasingly broader swath of artists from across Europe. And as curated beside Turkish and Iranian artists she is trailblazing a new order of appreciation, inclusive of fringe perspectives. Similarly exemplified by widely respected London galleries such as JD Malat, representing Turkish sculptor Hande



Şekerciler, Jam is adding an independent momentum to the management of these outlying arts communities within and outside the international market.

That said, Jam curated contemporary Norwegian painter Johan Söderström for the *Stay Art Home* show, particularly his piece, *296 Turned Table - Wishing Well* (2020). It is a mixed media work that appears to be an agglomeration of eyeball-like shapes that form indiscernible, fluid patterns. Söderström works like a handyman, using home improvement tools that would have a certain resonance with the overall theme of Jam's curation. But considering his technical ingenuity, and its effect, it seems that much is lost in its digital perception.

Söderström crafts his own type of variation on "kintsugi," or Japanese cracked pottery, so as to tease out the history of the materials he uses, emphasizing cracks and textures. It was a tradition that the artist Sarkis more explicitly referenced in his recent show at Dirimart, *Untitled*, using broken stained glass. But Söderström might be seen to have a kindred spirit with Khataei, with respect to the roughness of his final piece and their mutual medium-focus. With cement wood, Söderström has produced many series based on philosophical concepts. The latest works of Söderström, two of which are at the *Stay Art Home* bear resemblances to his earlier pieces, while proposing the indescribable novelty of their design. Following his abstract, textural pieces are more traditionally figurative color paintings by the Turkish artist Orhan Umut. Born in 1972 in southeastern Diyarbakır province, his observational works are uncanny evocations of social and architectural environments from which he emerged to become a world-renowned painter. In his *Untitled* series of four paintings, Umut depicts raven-haired personages wearing black shoes, and plain, casual, though slightly formal clothes. The colors red, green and blue run throughout. The curation begins with a vision of three women standing outside of a short building painted a vibrant blue. One woman holds the hand of a girl dressed in what looks like a school uniform. Two of the women talk to each other. They both wear red top garments. Umut's choice of color, according to the figure, is as puzzling as Söderström's rustic abstraction.

A single work by the young artist Vahid Chamani, born in Tehran in 1984, hangs in the midst of *Stay Art Home* like a gothic mood out of Washington Irving's macabre short story, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, or a Tim Burton film. It is an oil painting on cardboard, titled, *Amino Acids* (2020), and centers an anthropomorphic figure on a horse. The steed is just shy of being technically life-like, as its legs fade into the white background as if it were submerged in pure white snow. The handless humanoid of Chamani's imagination rides on its back, without a saddle, looking out from bulging eyes. Whether consciously or not, the Iranian artist evokes the visage of Janus, the Roman deity of January, who looks backward and forwards at once. It is a fitting point of meditation as 2021 begins utterly dependent on the affairs of the past year, while the planet's inhabitants gaze longingly, and perhaps fearfully, to a future that has never seemed less certain. But what artists affirm is that the world is subject to the whims of creativity.

January 8, 1:33 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Salad

The shadow of a green rabbit is cast over the entrance to The Pill, an otherwise nondescript storefront of a pale, semi-transparent whitewash, its entrance only steps away from the bustling inner-city traffic along the Golden Horn inlet. With reference to pop culture as televised via America, the rabbit conjures child cartoon nostalgia for the wily voice of Mel Blanc over the elusive character by Tex Avery.

Yet, the curious silhouette of the bunny as it stands incarnate at The Pill in Istanbul is not chewing on an orange carrot stick down to its green shoots. Its body leans against the exterior wall in a nonchalant fashion, rather hospitably, as to say, welcome, let's sit and dine like civilized human beings for once. What the works of artist İrem Günaydın offer as curated inside The Pill, is an eccentric play on the inherent variety and plain materiality of rabbit food.

Most immediate, the entryway foyer before the main gallery at The Pill is standard white as is customary for the majority of shows at the small institution that uniquely exhibits Francophone and Latin American artists from Paris and Mexico City for art lovers in Istanbul, certainly an invaluable exploit. Günaydın is local, however, from Istanbul, that is, despite its aversion to the prescriptions of exclusivity on the urban chain of neoliberal globalization.

And it might be argued that there is no other commodity quite like agricultural products to design and influence the economic ties and multicultural sways of international relations within the zeitgeists of old, and of today. Günaydın, however, does not treat food as such, but approaches the methods of its culinary preparation as philosophical metaphors, putting such elements as Newtonian physics, Grecian classicism, *The Matrix*, and art history into a blender.

The opening of *Salad Cake* spans a peculiar, autobiographical literary treatise, sprawled over a limited-edition poster. The outline of the recurring green rabbit stands under a titular text, "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you." The font is elegant, old-fashioned, befitting the curtains of Ionic column imprints that hang before the core exhibition space. It has a contrasting effect, tricky, rabbit-like.

In her conversational writing voice, Günaydın introduces herself as a "rather young person" penning a letter to the reader "as an artist" and stipulates that the letter need not be answered. In fact, if the reader might try, they'd likely not find its author by her supposed name. She goes on to reveal that there are two İrems, in fact – one who makes art and the other who makes a living in a foreign exchange office.

Almost right away, she breaks from her humdrum professional confessional to thoughts on the ancient Greek pantheon, specifically the beauty contest, hosted by Paris of Troy, between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite over the golden apple. Under the heading, "Maceration," which essentially means chewing, Günaydın goes from Newton's gravitational apple to a spinning DJ whose record choices mirror Paris of Troy deliberating over the three goddesses of his myth.

Günaydın relates the force of gravity to her writing practice, and to the upward and downward motions required when cooking with a knife. And then, in her characteristic manner of flitting across subjects, she refers to the pill scene in *The Matrix*, which has curious parallels with the gallery in Balat showing her work, and with that of the rabbit, although green instead of white. Irem is like Alice, traveling to wonderland and back through her imagination.

If there is a relationship to the apples of French artist Paul Cezanne and the golden apple of Greek myth, Günaydın has inferred that it might be found by also relating the works of two other painters, gifted with historic insight into the nature of reality. Since Cezanne painted a basket of apples and transformed the representation and perception of art from Cubism to impressionism, Günaydın reflects on Rene Magritte, Nicolas Poussin and Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts.

Magritte is famed for the phrase, “This is Not A Pipe,” a subtitle to his 1929 painting, *The Treachery of Images*. Günaydın imagined him in his signature bowler hat, presented with a pill, like that which Neo took in *The Matrix* but also, in her fancy, posed before Cezanne. Embarking from the surrealistic interpretation a la Magritte, Günaydın turns *The Matrix* dialectic on its head, stating that there is no pill.

Readapting the 1999 script of the Wachowski sisters into the mouth of Magritte, Günaydın performed a dramatic stunt, interlocking narrative motifs in popular culture and making them her own. Her invented Magritte is quoted: “Then you will see that it is not the pill that changes the state of Matrix, it is yourself.” And following his materialization of a bird who eats the pills anyway, Günaydın goes on to announce the presence of Gijsbrechts.

The seventeenth-century Flemish painter Gijsbrechts was, according to Günaydın’s whims, “from two-point-five dimensions.” She first describes him as an artist who “makes things that do not exist appear to exist.” And the kaleidoscope of sources runs deeper as Gijsbrechts, under the pen of Günaydın, speaks of a pair of ancient Greek painters from the fifth century B.C., Zeuxis of Heraclea, whose realism fools birds, before Parrhasios of Ephesus, fools Zeuxis.

In the concluding passages of her prefatory text work, Günaydın writes reflexively, with a self-conscious forbearance, so as to take the reader along gently into her otherwise dense escapades of surreal fiction. She explains: “Dear reader consider the following passages as a series of zig-zag and curve pathways that gradually lead the eye from foreground to middle ground to background.”

There is a persistent and intriguing accord between visual art and creative fiction in terms of framing subjects of imagined perception. Both are conceptual contexts in which the existence of objects is suspect, the former often defined more in terms of space, as in a gallery, museum or installation, and the latter in terms of time, with respect to the durational length of the storytelling.

*Salad Cake* progresses through *The Pill* with a series of rectangular pieces of a wooden aesthetic. Each background is exactly identical, only their variation proceeds with the tacking of transparent sheets on which capitalized texts are printed. They are the idiosyncratic enunciations of Günaydın, whose attention sways between culinary processes and philosophical axioms.

Some are a bizarre mixture of the two: “The fruit on the table / The dishes and the bottles / Are never set for a meal.” Beside a video that finishes the show with the extravagant voice of the artist, a piece of photogrammetry and Multi Jet Fusion three-dimensional print, *Decimal Fraction* (2020) offers an unadorned arrangement of salad ingredients, which, considering her anecdotes from classical Greece to surrealist Paris, make art history.

January 15, 2:15 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Syntheses

To the Western gaze, the leaping dance of the Maasai is an iconic signature of exotic, distant lands, where people adorned in entirely distinctive dress are festooned in necklaces as wide as the brim of a safari hat, robed in vibrant reds and blues, their bodies thin as the trees that surround them in the semi-arid ecology along the Great Rift Valley. In her two-minute video, *We Are Here*, curated at the center of her retrospective, *This Place We Call World*, which encompasses nearly four decades of work, Selma Gürbüz adapts the photogenic tradition.

In notes accompanying the piece, the curation by Öykü Özsoy discusses the transformative potential of the ritual and its representation. It has the power to transport its observer not only into a worldview indigenous to the African Great Lakes, but also toward a shapeshifting mentality where reality and fiction coalesce and birth a singular order of being. The scene's naturalness contrasts with digital collaborations, a pointillist particle animation by Ali Emre Karaçalı and heaving mechanical sound engineering by Kerim Karaoğlu.

The video itself was shot by the poet Burak Acar, who Gürbüz traveled with to the Serengeti, ultimately inspiring her return from a three-year hiatus to the exhibition of her work. There is a moment that she reveals in an interview when a lone lion appeared in the grasslands, moving to the rhythm of the wind. She described the effect of the moment as a shock akin to what she felt on first seeing the Maasai, a spirit of independence that empowered her to create anew in direct dialogue with her prolific past.

With over a hundred works selected by Özsoy, a senior curator at Istanbul Modern, the show exemplifies the best intentions of the Women Artists Fund, foregrounding Gürbüz as part of the ongoing project of making female Turkish artists more visible. Gürbüz, born in 1960 in Istanbul, received her initial higher art education in the U.K. at Exeter College before returning to Istanbul to pursue a painting degree at Marmara University. Since graduating in the mid-1980s, she has gone on to enter the world's most prestigious collections, including The British Museum.

One of the more impressive elements of Gürbüz, which jumps out in a way perhaps comparable to the upward momentum of a Maasai ceremony, is her attention to paper, specifically handmade varieties, as intimately related to the subject matter that appears on their surface. The fibrous material is organic and speaks of its adventure of having been made with a force and grace not unlike her fine approach to painting itself. Yet, the material discourse of naturalism as pure and alive is imbalanced inside the institutional airs of Istanbul Modern. While respectful to the formidable role that Gürbüz has assumed in Turkish art history, the in-house curatorial practice of Özsoy is about as old-fashioned as the cultural importance of a Western expedition to the African wilderness in the midst of twenty-first-century globalization. It is problematic to pose Africa as a distant, reliable muse for Turkish art, aligned with native tribes and untouchable lands, while increasing numbers of African migrants work the streets of Istanbul and Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji exhibits concurrently at Pera Museum.

Gürbüz maintains a palette of red, gold and black throughout her works, evoking a mythopoetic world of her own making, alongside the land of the living. While influenced by cultural motifs, such as Greek pottery, Japanese calligraphy and African sculpture, she is grappling with the visualization of the afterlife as it recurs before her alone, as a phenomenon coexistent in the sensual world, accessible through alternate states of mind. Death is a constant theme in her works, yet, it is as if she were painting its hints and whims from the other side.

The red sun blazes in the next world, its rays dangling over a golden sky, under which black skeletons dance with anthropomorphic plants. It is an active, spiritual realm in which the boundaries of life are long transcended, animated by the limitlessness of flight. There is no solid ground to speak of in such works, as *From Where We Left Off* (2019), made with ink on handmade paper, but rather vaguely, the explanatory texts that follow each work throughout the show refer to the anachronistic generality of her integrating Eastern and Western aspects.

In an increasingly color-conscious world where racial blindness is an excuse for ignorance and words have unprecedented potency to conjure histories of violence, the near-symmetrically perfect, ancient aesthetics of the piece *Reflection* (2018-2019) are cause for certain wonder. The unmistakably human figures are winged. One is black, the other orange, and both of their brains are exposed, further enunciating their departure from realism, toward a world where myth and art commingle. But Gürbüz advances a stylization of figurative realism in relation to her early work in the Paris printmaking studio of surrealist Spanish artist Joan Miro, known for his wisps of fancy that delighted in the informality of color over shape. Gürbüz, however, is on the other side of the spectrum in terms of her approachability. Her works are representational, but they also bend reality, particularly gender expression. *Tree Woman* (2019), for example, diversifies human dualism in the same way that she points to the life in death, and the death in life.

The celebration of universal, transcendent unity is sometimes merely a lack of clarity, and such could be said of the curation's differentiating between creative periods and approaches in the life's work of Gürbüz, who explored such popular techniques as op-art in a series of ink portraits of women on handmade Japanese paper. Yet, these trials were not necessarily fulfilled of themselves, and seem to have been gateways for her to realize more mature works, such as her oil painting *Daybreak. Burden.* (2011).

Another series of landscape works of gouache, made in 2006, appear almost irrelevant as they hang in their own hall, on thin paper, slightly off-center. In their naivety, however, is the redemption of the artist's voice, as someone who has dared to integrate a foreign visual world into Turkish art history, which is too often circumscribed and pigeonholed by domestic issues. And she has come around, through the African wilderness, to such series as *Creatures* (2019), fictive, humanoid animals that she adapted for the video *Chase* (2020), set against observational photography of a female lion emerging out of obscurity, staring back.

January 21, 2:17 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Contemporaneity

Sarkis has put his unmistakable, mustachioed visage back together, applying methods of stained glass and the Japanese pottery technique of “kintsugi,” literally translated as “golden repair.” Thin, and young, from his earlier days ripe for the streets of Paris, he stares back into time from the installation of lead, steel and LED. It is, titled, *V 06* (2012), one of only a pair of editions from the Rabia-Ali Güreli Collection, chairpersons of Contemporary Istanbul.

*V 06* appeared recently at Dirimart, a prestigious international gallery, often showing German and American artists alongside Turkish innovators. Using pieces of stained glass as “kintsugi,” Sarkis effected a kind of Christian nostalgia for spiritual tragedy, imbued with a Japanese accent on impermanence. The piece looks across the institutional, whitewashed hall at a neon-lit installation by Firat Engin.

*Frequency Series I*, by Engin, includes a polyester frame, wood and decota, which is a polyvinyl chloride foam sheet. The neon, frequently employed by Sarkis, makes a number of appearances in the show *6 Artists in Search of a Precedent* as it emanates with the passage of time. The pinkish-blue hue reflects off a darkened space that would otherwise house a mirror within its oval frame, elaborated with floral designs in metal.

Engin’s work dominates the immediate visual field in the entrance room of *6 Artists in Search of a Precedent*, particularly his installation, *Istila*, which, in Turkish, means “occupation,” or “plague.” It is essentially comprised of polyester coffee cups, grande-size, painted in a subdued gold. Some of the cups are knocked over, perhaps to communicate a context in which material that is trashed comes back to haunt the world, in a more malign form.

The first law of thermodynamics, also referred to as the Law of Conservation of Energy, states that energy cannot be created nor destroyed. In that sense, the deluging proliferation of coffee cups is analogous to the rampancy of free-market capitalism in confrontation with the prevailing era of the global pandemic. The floor is taken over by the useless objects of waste at the end of which Engin installed, *Breath IV* (2017), a found broken window, an apt symbol.

The curatorial choices of Kahraman are suggestive of broad, historical influence within the present, cultural moment. The placement of an object in the intellectual laboratory of a public art exhibition has the potential to grab unsuspecting eyes and make them realize that, simply by seeing, they may open doors that lead, however, to more doors, unlocked and waiting for new entrants. That is just the effect of *Carpet with Horses* (1986) by Gülsün Karamustafa.

The artist’s reputation precedes her, where, with younger artists at the show, they are preceded by their predecessors who made art history in which their works are situated, or advance toward some unforeseen, critical horizon. *Carpet with Horses*, to the weary and untrained, might appear naive, unworldly and even random. But its collagist emergence through the materials and figurative display conveyed are couched in perennial intrigues.

Karamustafa received her passport in 1987. The year she created *Carpet with Horses* was her very last confined to Turkey. Apparently, she had been focusing on rural migrants, and their culture, which would explain the rather kitsch piece of carpet craft. Another female artist who works with textiles, Güneş Terkol, is curated alongside the piece by Karamustafa, only Terkol's installation, *Holographic Record* (2014-2020), has a more directly complex tone.

Eight pieces of double stitched fabric hang suspended from the ceiling, floating in the interior air. They show human figures carrying signboards, as walking advertisements on the corner of certain inner-city roads in the United States. And in the background, a projection animates the cold rattle of metal fencing, and a textile piece, like that physically in the room, swaying in the wind on what looks to be a sunny, winter day.

A blast of electric light bursts through retinas upstairs, on the second floor of the Akbank Sanat show, *6 Artists in Search of a Precedent*. And approaching the hybrid piece of neon, carpet, wood and plexiglass by Ramazan Can, titled *Feel at Home* (2020), there is a warmth that can be felt. Its crimson-purple luminosity is almost palpable, as the artist reconstructed the intricate weave of a traditional Turkish carpet with glowing neon tubes.

Can has subverted ordinary perception with his distinctive material fusions, which touch sensitive nerves for those familiar with life in Turkey. His piece, *Attic* (2017-2018), merges concrete and weaving over thirty-five unique pieces. *Attic* could be seen as the upstairs corollary to Engin's *Istila*, exploring the spread of both concrete, as basic to the widespread construction zones of Istanbul, and woven carpets, key aspects of Turkish national consciousness.

*Attic*, however, facilitates curious insights, where the concrete and weaving interact, as the woven material fades, piecemeal, fragmented and nonexistent over some of the bare, rock cubes. The use of carpets and empty space is curated, in direct line of sight with *Attic*, in the piece *Untitled* (2019) by Şakir Gökçebağ. It is of a carpet that has been cored, a circle cut out of its center. But the circle is completed outside of its frame.

Through artists Burcu Yağcıoğlu, Murat Akagündüz and Alpin Arda Bağcık, Kahraman has curated with a deepening sense of blur, or the perceptibility of transience in the objective spatiality of two-dimensional works. Yağcıoğlu, integrating a skeletal jaw, also included a video and drawings of pencil and acrylic on paper. These defy gravity, as a swimmer floats under a marine sky upside down, and the chaotic atmosphere swirls like a living organism.

Akagündüz, using graphite material on paper, explored abstract washes of nebulous transparency, multilayered with varying degrees of density and technicality. In 2016, the writer Aslı Seven curated a show of Akagündüz's works at Arter, titled *Vertigo*. In the catalog essay, she wrote: "The intangible movement of light between the shades of white never relinquishes the possibility that this meaning reached by a gaze 'stretched' in time, might, at any moment, slip away and disappear into the void of an endless abyss."



The curatorial decisions that Kahraman made to exhibit works by Avni Lifiç, who died in 1927, or Semiha Berksoy, born in 1910, round out the exhibition as encompassing almost the entire breadth of modernism in Turkish painting toward a renewed grappling with issues that have prevailed since, yet, to contemporaries, might seem utterly unprecedented. These artists are in search of a precedent, after all. And what Kahraman is perhaps asking is whether or not the world of art-making can be presumed to follow the first law of thermodynamics.

January 28, 8:35 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Organic

The dust of a new installation had not yet settled in the air of the spare, modest interior of Öktem Aykut. In between its concrete walls, a photographer opened the legs of his tripod and stood in front of a pair of sculptural works by Koray Ariş, one of which sprouted with a symmetrical impression akin to palm fronds, colored in a subdued tawny yellow, over a murky, green pedestal that extended down to the floor like an isosceles triangle.

Beside the arboreal conception was a semicircular shape, its rounded line hollowed and incomplete, standing with two legs, grounded. The rustic, cerulean hue of its surface bore a resemblance to the dry, warehouse-like effect of the space in which it demanded attention. The photographer was not looking at the sculptures, however, but through the doorway to the street.

On his right is another circular work, painted with a ruddy, whitish hue – an empty, circular object laying on the body of its curved line. Ariş appears to have tested the definitions of dimensionality by manufacturing otherwise abstract, theoretical figures as physical, even aesthetic fabrications. The widening base of the circle turns upward to a crick, in which it also conveys the equally supernatural abstraction of the right angle.

There are works mounted on the wall that surrounds the centerpiece exhibition of abstract sculpture by Ariş, who worked in Rome in the early 1970s under the auspices of a state scholarship. He was groomed to be a proud representative of Turkish modern art, yet, when he returned to Turkey to work as a professor, his creative and professional affinities veered sidelong. For decades, he has remained generally antisocial and obscure.

The gallerist Tankut Aykut, who along with partner Doğa Öktem is one of a pair of young, upward-looking founder directors at their eponymous gallery, Öktem Aykut, has a personal investment in the life and works of Ariş, whom he has known throughout his career. Long represented by Galeri Nev, one of Turkey's oldest contemporary art galleries, Ariş is a staple reference when considering alternative futures in the history of Turkish modern art.

His contemporaries, such as fellow abstract sculptor Seyhun Topuz, also at Galeri Nev, are arguably overshadowed by their immediate predecessor, Ayşe Erkmen, whose early works in abstract sculptures, since 1969, were on display at the prestigious reopening of Arter as Turkey's flagship contemporary art museum. Erkmen, however, traversed an alternative path which further distances Ariş from the center of critical and commercial admiration.

Öktem Aykut, however, under the passionate curatorial initiative of Aykut, for their current group show, *Trunkless*, has contextualized the works of Ariş anew, as persistently and internationally relevant as ever. In a retrospective catalogue book published by Galeri Nev, Italian art writer Antonio Del Guercio reflected on his meeting with Ariş, whom he later curated in Rome. Guercio defended the effect of Italy on Ariş, comparing his work to late Roman reliefs.

He wrote: “Koray’s works constitute concrete evidence of the possibility of materializing an artistic creation which is modern ... And I want to emphasize once again that these gifts or qualities have their very roots in a ‘historical memory’ not superficially exhibited but inherited from the ancient ‘know-how’ of thousands and thousands of anonymous people who worked on those lands from the times of Constantine to the Byzantine era and up to the Ottomans.”

There is an oil on canvas in between the two sculptures that stand, side by side, in the main, ground floor hall of Öktem Aykut. The swaying contours of its pink body meander out of the frame of the canvas like an aurora borealis in intimate opposition to the more earthly, anthropocentric fixtures of Ariş. The painter, Aret Gıcır, is an Istanbul-born Armenian artist.

Gıcır contributed a compact work of oil on paper, figuring the head of a black dog, reclining and stretching over a bleary, purplish-red background. It is a dizzying, dark portrayal of animal life. The piece, *Dog* (2016), is curated next to a few delicate specimens of embroidery on fabric by Emel Kurhan, careful studies of feathers against blank beige, chairs in clouds and a leaf encompassed by two subtle shades of textile.

The art of Kurhan has a special resonance with that of postmodern naturalist drawings by Rocha, who spent much of her earlier artist career in the field of abstraction, and now, from her home in Brazil, has crafted works that might easily be confused with anachronisms out of the notebook of a nineteenth-century herbalist. Yet, her poise has an air of experimentation and curiosity that charms its thinkers beyond historical criticism.

Rocha followed a path as an artist that could be seen as diametrically juxtaposed with that of Ariş, with the latter pursuing figurative naturalism to organic abstraction, while the former did just the opposite. Rocha also made a personal mark on Turkish art history through her marriage to the late artist Hüseyin Alptekin. Yet, Rocha is a formidable creative intellectual in her own right, as is lucid in her watercolors of Peruvian cacti, orchids and untitled flora.

The abstract, sculptural works of Stijn Ank are a vocal addition to *Trunkless*, as such pieces as *14.2015* conjure a flowering mold across the room from Rocha’s realist precision. Yet, it might appear that there are multiple narratives of production and appreciation from artist to artist, and that their correlation requires a quite venturesome leap. The taste for abstraction in northern Europe is perhaps distinct from that of Turkey.

As a Belgian artist who has also worked in Rome and Berlin, Ank developed nonfigurative abstract works that can be enjoyed as flat streaks of color – pigmented plaster over a metal structure surface. But their aesthetic is not altogether divergent from that which Gıcır affected with his more traditionally employed oil on canvas. From the perspective of passing eyes, the presence of Ank’s works makes for a peripheral curiosity.

In abstraction, the sense of representational ambiguity flirts with the temptations of formalism and the risks of vagueness. Ank, in such works as *07.2018*, may have created a scene that can be

interpreted as a landscape among those select minds prepared to make the effort to do their own imagining, but to the more blunt observer, the faded smears are as unidentifiable as they are indigestible.

In his official biography, Ank is said to navigate the relationship between matter and void, as between the sculpture and its surrounding space. With that reference in hand, it is apt to describe such a contemporary art exhibition, in the midst of local and global concerns, according to the title of the Öktem Aykut curation: *Trunkless*. While pointing upward to a beautiful horizon of creative futures rooted in history, the heart and weight of the matter are lost.

February 4, 1:28 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Synesthete

The concept of silence could be said to be a Platonic ideal, a form, not unlike that of eternity, freedom or right, through which the sensual reality of the world passes, and is shaped, ultimately perceived as an imperfect reflection of that everlasting, underlying nature of its essence. It was a career-long point of meditation for the American composer John Cage, whose late works in particular continue to confound not only the music establishment but that of art and culture itself.

As a critique of Western compartmentalization, the art world houses apparently almost every work of cultural import that would otherwise be homeless elsewhere, within the brackets of a society bent on anthropocentric, self-entertainment. Music equally encompasses the realms of fashion and theater, fame and technology, architecture and dance. Yet, in defense of art institutions and even Western naivety before the awe-inspiring complexity of the human invention, the nebulosity of art's real estate remains pertinent.

The double jeopardy of categorization in the face of cultural work expressed at the seam and periphery, emergence and resolution of formal production introduce a peculiar challenge when it comes to public engagement. And under the extraordinary conditions of lockdown society, the presence of music as part of concrete object-based appreciation maintains a special, if nostalgic value. *For Eyes That Listen*, in the winter of early 2021, teases its seeing-listeners with a puzzling course of musical ganders, glimpses and clips.

In November of 2013, Melih Fereli, the curator of *For Eyes That Listen*, supervised a live performance to accompany an exhibition of the artist Sarkis adapting the avant-garde compositions of John Cage. The result was a collaboration between the *ney* reed-flute of Kudsi Ergüner and the shakuhachi of Jean-François Lagrost. These musicians were performing music based on ninety-six watercolors after a flute score by John Cage. In 1983, the piece was known as a *composition-in-progress* and its circular sketches were reminiscent of ethereal ink painting.

In the opening hall of *For Eyes That Listen*, two compositions by John Cage grace the long, centerpiece wall. *Score Without Parts (40 Drawings by Thoreau): Twelve Haiku* (1978) and *Dereau #31* (1982). These are inspired by Cage's studies of Henry David Thoreau, whose writings on Walden Pond fired the nineteenth-century Transcendentalist movement in the U.S. during a time when civil rights were beginning to crystallize at the forefront of national consciousness. These special prints of engraving and etching can be seen as avant-garde musical notation.

Cage was also a student of the Zen teacher Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki and combined his appreciation for the political philosophy of the New England hermit Thoreau with a healthy dose of contemplative, Japanese stoicism. Cage, whose early piano works showed a gift for beauty and symmetry, expanded outward into atonal and serialism with meticulous attention to detail so as to provoke listeners to observe their surroundings, with all of their senses. One of the superlative qualities of art is that it deepens the holism of direct experience.

Beside the notational sketches of Cage is a triptych of pigmented ink prints affixed to nine small loudspeakers. The effect of the piece, *vergnügt und froh* (“joyful and happy”) by Hans Peter Kuhn is of aural space, both by the suspension of imagination required to inhabit the frame of the work in and of itself and as a projection of sound intermingling with the ambient environment. Despite the generally cold, lifeless museum air in which it is situated, there is a lightness to the lengthy interplay of image and sound, drawing seer-listeners close.

And in the middle of the prefatory room is a work by a name that has become synonymous with video art and the intervention of multimedia into the art world since the 1960s, namely Nam June Paik. His piece, *Random Access* (1963/1979) is what is known as a “silent sound sculpture,” the key ingredient being silence, as a conceptual presence juxtaposed with the materiality of musical equipment, in this case, a tower of vinyl on a skewer hovering over a now-vintage record player.

Among the more legendary of the Fluxus artists, a wave of radicalism in the performance and installation of sound, Paik broke into the scene after his concert of Frederic Chopin in Cologne of 1960, during which time he leapt from his chair and charged into the audience, targeting John Cage and David Tudor with scissors and shampoo. It was all part of the act, however, they are said to have advised that he take up at least a modicum of the theory that they were then gleaning from exotic philosophies traditional to Paik’s homeland in the Far East.

Tudor, as it were, along with Cage, is a prevalent name at Arter, particularly as the exhibitions of *For Eyes That Listen*, and *Rainforest V (variation 3)*. In the acoustical Karbon space floors below *For Eyes That Listen*, Arter premiered *Rainforest V (variation 3)*, adapting Tudor’s initial vision as a composer in collaboration with dancer Merce Cunningham on his modern ballet, *Rainforest* (1968). In 1973, as remounts of *Rainforest* invited other kindred creatives, the composer John Driscoll found mutual inspiration in its productions.

Driscoll donated his work, *Driscollage* (1973 [2020]) to Arter, for the express purpose of connecting the two shows, running parallel, between *For Eyes That Listen*, and *Rainforest V (variation 3)*. In like manner as that of Paik’s spacey vinyl levitating upward in ascending order, decreasing in size, for *Random Access*, so the copper floats of *Driscollage* hang freely in a dedicated room. The novel designation of a “float object” is a cornerstone installation principle of both of these sound-based Arter exhibitions.

In contrast to the horizontal progression of line notation and its textual accompaniment in liner notes, Fluxus performers and avant-garde composers could be said to have foregrounded the verticality of musical composition, which as a physical expression might best be perceived in terms of suspension. That is the basis of *Rainforest V (variation 3)*, and also, which can be seen throughout *For Eyes That Listen*, particularly in the *Untitled* installation by Annette Ruenzler, who exacted a scintillatingly beautiful evocation of lighting harmony.

A single note hangs in an empty space and falls. Sometimes, it crashes, like in the piece, *Destroyed Piano with Photograph* (2008), by Carles Santos, which by its title alone, is what it obviously is. Through the practices of conceptual art's deconstructionism, the piano becomes a mere object, silently present, perfectly meaningless on its own, besides an oxygen tube, as in *Klavier Oxygen* (1985) by Joseph Beuys, or unplayable, as in *Play Cultural Situation* (2007) by Jülius Koller, of an upright cast in a net. Its art is captured, objectified, modern, unmusical.

February 12, 12:33 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Spring

As the snow melts, the ground reveals itself in the bloom of life, that although once having been obscured by the disappearing act of winter's passing, its vital roots burst with movement and color, offering those in its midst the chance to enjoy the nourishments of its biological makeup, and the merrymaking metaphor of its return. In the high mountains of Turkey's southeast, there is a plant, that to locals is known in their language of Zaza as *yeling*, an auspicious variety of herb, esculent and ripe for all manner of culinary effect.

But the longing that people feel for *yeling* is not merely on account of the extraordinary taste it adds to soups and pastries but because it is a harbinger of seasonal change, effectively serving as a kind of earthbound indication that the cold, silent months at the end of the year have come to a close, given way to all that is new, vibrant, alive. To have an object by which to express such collective ebullience is characteristic of traditional societies, and there is a special sweetness to the meaning that a plant holds for people still in the twenty-first century.

Celayir, who hails from the mountain settlements of eastern Bingöl province, has ever drawn from the stretches of wide, open, ascending plains, the fields where Alexander the Great walked to meet the Babylonians and where today, world history is engraved, deep into the bedrock stone of planetary memory. As the pages of official record flutter, kept to the letter in the storerooms of Western civilization, there remain the multigenerational witnesses whose voices, however, echoed, are heard at a distance, far-flung from the cores of social industry.

Yet, Celayir, with a particularly postmodern painter's eye, extends his vision, as a local abroad, in concert with global attention, and by his yearly homecoming, traveling from Germany, where he also resides, to tap the source of his inspirational fount, in the landscape where he first opened his eyes. For that reason, beyond the art world itself, his work is uniquely valuable as a bridge for seers in Turkey to gather some of the bounty of the country on which they stand, poised to appreciate its multivalent cultural and ecological diversity.

The exhibition of paintings, *Yeling*, at C.A.M. Gallery, is a welcome window to the wider world, sheltered within a snug commercial outfit along the winding, steep slopes of cobblestoned streets in Istanbul, in sight of Galata Tower, and surrounded by antique shops. And as a tasteful autobiographical gesture, encompassing the career of Celayir, C.A.M. curated a series of six serigraphy works from 1997, in which Celayir was studying the shape and texture of the Bingöl Mountains, that, in Turkish, are known for their "thousand lakes."

Celayir is every bit a nature explorer, as were his ancestors, yet equipped with a formidable talent as a seer himself, robust art education and a career-long venture in the world of contemporary abstract painting, his is a different acuity of sight, one that sees, perhaps, through and out of the span of nature in which his visual ideas foment. It does not take an expert art enthusiast to notice a parallel in the forms of representation between the histories of naturalism and abstraction in painting.



For his latest series of works, “Yelng,” Celayir reconstitutes that coincidence of abstraction in naturalist painting with a subtle, distinctive eye, integrating his time-honored techniques, such as collagist texturing, and a kind of pointillist color scheme. His canvases essentially show stretches of ground, worn with patches of yellowed and discolored leaves, thawing out in the free, warming air of spring. It is a time of revelation, of exposure to the elements, and most strikingly, to light. Such is the pastiche of earthly manifestation, as in his work, *Organic Cosmos* (2020), in which there are touches of frost over the surface of the thawing leaves. It is perhaps a nod to the exhibition run of *Yelng*, which ended just before the true beginning of spring, but, like the plant of its muse, hints of a time to ensue, in the near future, in which the activities and moods of the people shift, repositioned against the heat of the sun. For the opening piece, *Hora* (2018), shown in the window at C.A.M., the wintry clouds have yet to pass over the hills.

*Yelng* is basically comprised of two variations on the landscape, in which the painter is looking directly at the ground and secondly, conceivably holds up the *yelng* plant as a specimen, contrasted with an empty background. The latter depiction of nature is a departure from Celayir’s otherwise condensed compositions, in which the canvas is entirely filled from end to end with richly overlapping colorations and varying shapes. His palette, however, remains similar, with generous usages of yellow, green, white and red.

As his works change, so does the passage of time, as the frost thaws over the series, *Organic Cosmos* (2020). In that way, nature proceeds deliberately, incremental at first, seemingly little by little, until the superficial canvas of sensual display blows over and suddenly, the would-be observer is fully immersed in an entirely different plane of perception and experience. It is an interesting transformation, considering Celayir’s revised perspective, from within the landscape, to an objective outsider, as it were. In one of the *Organic Cosmos* paintings at C.A.M., Celayir crafted the end of a shoot from the *yelng* plant, as it appears, sidelong, over a flat, exposed patch of earth. It is dotted with ruddy greens and orangey vegetable decomposition, an utter delight of a post-impressionist oil painting. And there are four canvases that frame bundled tangles of *yelng* shoots, folding in on itself, swirling around with multiple degrees of upturned rotation, like something out of a Baroque portrait, in which the train of an elegant dress floats mesmerizing into the corner.

For a critical foray, however, a question remains as to the intention of Celayir in objectifying the beloved plant of his home region. It could be a comment on his separation from the land, a self-referential meta-expression of his work as a painter who has come to see his birthplace in relation to the uprooting he has known living in Germany, returning to the mountains of Bingöl with the nostalgia of exile, not entirely unlike the traveling biologists who took up skills as herbalist draftsmen in centuries past.

February 19, 11:30 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Passing

Against the rough exterior of a weathered building in a distinctively cultural, residential district in Istanbul, where the avenue of Boğazkesen slopes down like the depression of a valley between the inner-city hills of Tophane and Cihangir neighborhoods, there is a canvas that hangs, loosely, over a rusted, chipped wall. Its white-on-white is surprisingly visible, and while the text is faint, its message is bold. A close examination of its three, terse, expressive sentences, reveals an astute curation by Metin Ilktekin, with peculiarly luring site-specific awareness.

The words offered to describe the modest show are elegant, pointed. The vitrine shop that holds the “collection of interior objects,” is poised to be in a “state of ordered flux.” It is not entirely sure what it seeks to convey. It is approachable, human. The institutionalization of exchanges between artist, curator and city are not stripped of emotional personality, of the psychological complexity inherent in communicating to the public sphere, a gesture that is increasingly fraught with anxiety in Istanbul where the act of assembly is overshadowed by draconian governance.

As the text reads, the show forwards a “forgotten deserted display,” an apt comment on the nature of the art world, as it has struggled to maintain a physical existence at the end of the frayed shoestring of life under lockdowns and curfews. The vitrine storefront exhibition, ultimately, is a fresh response to a world in which public interiors are a luxury. And inside, as the curatorial text relays, is a “collage of atmospheres.” These phrases are light to the touch, yet capture the exhibition, *Blue Kısmet*, with intuitive grace.

There is one neologism, a portmanteau, “meshmorable” used to identify a sense of the images that Eline Tsvetkova has produced for the show. It captures the vague undefinability of memory in an age where the means of recording the past prompt memories of their own, towards a collective meshing of memories, a latticework of nostalgia through which the present is tinted like the grainy imperfections of antique photography. As the natural faculties of the brain are outmoded, recording technology assumes a power play at once imposing, and cold.

Finally, the textual preface of *Blue Kısmet* ends by quoting lyrics from the 1984 song, *Hand on My Heart* by the English rock band, Shriekback, a new wave violation of soundscape paranoia whose appeal is long faded to post-punk revival dead ends. Under the artful eye of Ilktekin, however, the words to the screechy tune are brilliantly decontextualized to smart effect, “And all of this is not in explanation / It’s just me putting my hand on my heart.” And that, ultimately, is how *Blue Kısmet* feels, a gesture, even if a shot in the dark, sincere.

There is only one aspect of *Blue Kısmet* that is not visible to passersby from the storefront window where Viable Istanbul has set up shop in the name of art. It is a bijou closet of a backspace, with an especially evocative image stuck to the wall. Among the six photos that Tsvetkova used as the core material of her show, the one that is relatively concealed is curiously also a representation of concealment, in which three figures, a man in a suit flanked by two women in uniform hold their hands up to block their faces in front of the camera.

In front of the photograph, with its characteristic pale, airy blue tinge, are vintage wooden implements used to flatten carpets. It makes for a transporting, if disconcerting concoction of visual variables. The literal meaning is unclear. But the show, in general, is not shy about its being an enigma. That is, after all, what it expresses, steeped in the family history of the artist, whose Bulgarian side is uniquely removed from status quo cultural memory, as it would be performed by her Dutch antecedents.

Tsvetkova was in the midst of a residency at Trèlex in Zurich, during which time she felt the sting of isolation, and reached out to Ilktekin and Kerim Zapsu, who, without a budget, mounted her show in Istanbul with the flick of their wrists. The result, while relatively skeletal, endears for its communal sensibility, linked to an artist's reflexive process as part of the ongoing saga of self-identification amid Europe's whirlpools of sociocultural mixture. And Ilktekin himself, a Dutch-Turkish curator born and raised in Switzerland, adds a personal touch.

It is invaluable to have included Istanbul's appreciation for its own Balkan heritage, specifically that of neighboring Bulgaria, within Tsvetkova's nonverbal visual discourse. As a graduate student at the Royal College of Art in London, Tsvetkova is a welcome presence in Istanbul's fringe, pro-youth arts scene, where international integration amplifies and complements a largely independent, or privatized sector in support of contemporary, globally relevant artwork.

*Blue Kısmet* is a microcosmic free assembly, not of people, but of objects that bear the traces of human presence. The placement of high-gloss wooden floorboards that stretch along the floor in battered streaks affect the ambiance of a habitation that is fading away, from home to exhibition, country to concept, life to art. The pragmatics of daily domesticity are stripped away to reveal an exercise in the impractical creativity of aesthetically-engrossing, cerebral postmodernism.

From the street, the five photographs can be seen suspended from the ceiling on ropes and pulleys, with a semi-industrial look, gleaming with a metallic resonance. They seamlessly merge the artist's family archives from Bulgaria with that of photographs found in Istanbul, perhaps from one of the used bookstores and antique shops around the corner from the exhibition space, hawking the history of the city's lost, personal possessions. And while the show appears generally slapdash, it does not entirely subtract from the conveyance of its mood.

A pair of photos, placed one on top of the other, against the same panel, show a family outing of a kind, in which children stand under a tree, smiling for the shoot. There is a boy wearing the traditional German lederhosen with the characteristic cross-hatch suspenders in both photos. In the photo beside it, hanging on its own, are a group of men, uniformed, playing in the snow. Yet another shows a young man on a horse, and lastly, another male gathering on a street, below a window, filled to the brim with yet more men.

In every photo on display that can be seen from the street, there are shadows, conceivably of the photographer's head, or of other observers, in the bottom of the frames. Their silhouettes create

an unsettling feel. These subjects are being watched, and they know it. They are wary of it. So, they put on an act. They smile, which is a tradition that all still know in the popular use of photography. But between those captured, hidden, blocking their faces, and the men smirking and reveling, there is a gap, invisible, unimagined, until now.

February 25, 2:57 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Paper

The approach to art as a function of media, or if single-use, by its medium, whether as critic or creator is largely myopic, anachronistic to bygone times when painting and sculpture served to inform and humble illiterate masses to the whims of state and church. Yet, in a cultural moment in which art is a vague, all-purpose term for “anything goes”, the return to medium-centric criticism and production holds water. That is one way to see a new curation by Selin Akin at the classy Ferda Art Platform, housed in an antique apartment in Teşvikiye.

The artists behind the group show, *Of Paper*, at the platform, represent some of the more innovative creators at the forefront of Istanbul’s art world, spanning contemporary generations from early- to mid-career, including a healthy, multicultural frame of perspectives that is laudably local in its worldview, a trait shared by such shows as *On Celestial Bodies* at Arter, or *Coulisse* at the Yapı Kredi Culture, Arts and Publishing, both curated by Kevser Güler. The interior of Ferda Art Platform is brightly whitewashed for *Of Paper*, a nod to its blank muse.

Paper itself is refashioned, in many cases returned, to its creative origins, and sheds its utilitarian plainness, revealing an inner world that serves to catalyze the human mind, despite the overarching breadth of its mass manufacture for the purposes of industrial education since the early modern era. Akin has curated *Of Paper* with an emotional sensibility for paper as part of the multimedia layering of recorded memories, in which the ground of being, of life itself, like that of paper alone, is eclipsed by the daily saturation of virtual remembrance.

And interestingly, it is inherent to the resilience of paper through time, and until today, within the prevailing technological paradigm, whether as the metaphor of an internet web page, or the unrelenting persistence of physical bureaucratic documentation, that it is also the result of multiple components. *Of Paper* explores the internal textures of materiality, through juxtapositions of shade and form, so as to project, illuminate and problematize the vehicle by which language is foregrounded over what might be seen as works of mechanical sculpture.

The postmodern Turkish poet Ilhan Berk, who enjoys a healthy body of his literature in English translation, serves as a forerunning inspiration for Akin’s conceptualization of paper. She draws from Berk’s poetic description of paper, which “knows loneliness,” as it “waits too,” as for an impression over its otherwise bare surface. Such artists at *Of Paper*, like the seasoned multidisciplinary practitioner and professor Ferhat Özgür, leaned into the textural properties of paper not only as a draftsman but as a seamster might puncture a piece of fabric.

*Healing Tactics* (2019) and *The Last Debris* (2021) are two of Özgür’s works on display for *Of Paper*, detailing his pointillist precision like the multidisciplinary sculptor that he is. Much of the show is like a quiet exercise, as the works are basic. Özgür’s works are mere pen and colored pencil on paper. *Healing Tactics* is a weave of physiologies, the body from the womb through childhood and adolescence, in various medical and sports contexts, interwoven with the parts of bodies and machines.

*The Last Debris* reveals the many colors of an irregular cityscape, one quite familiar to the urban landscape in Turkey, where various conditions of construction commingle, much of it self-made, humble residences overshadowed by corporate and municipal projects. And detached in the corner, Özgür placed a full-body portrait of a toddler, being held up by arms outside the frame. It is an apt comparison to the growing pains of what might controversially be considered to be within the frame of the housing sector in a developing economy.

Across from the drawings of Özgür in the opening hall of the platform, which is painted so off-white as to effect an experience of the void, there is a four-plus minute video by Hüseyin Aksoy, titled *Creative River*. It is a performative homage to the prehistoric tradition of handmade paper manufacturing, adapting a Sumerian narrative. The narration is distinctive for its recitation in Kurdish, a language that conjures the spirit of the Mesopotamian landscape, as broad as it is bewildering, as the cradle of civilization.

Beside the video are two sheets of paper made by Aksoy himself. They are rough, almost like parchment, yet, out of their vegetal fibers, mixed with sticks and leaves lies the vessel of mythological thought, on which the flood of Western history has spread over the plain of human consciousness, transfixing social and personal identities through its multigenerational self-hypnosis. Aksoy dates the beginnings of his artistic investigation to 2400 B.C., a century in which Mesopotamia warred among its Early Dynastic rulers.

At the end of Aksoy's video, a piece of paper is complete, drawn from the running waters that are the *Creative River*, which could be understood as a magical fusion of the powers that have flowed with the stream of the Tigris and the Euphrates since time immemorial. Out of the past of humankind, Aksoy stepped into the same river just once and returned with the boon of historic inventions, that which has made history, as it is known, possible. The transportability of paper is the backbone of its resilience and stands as a cornerstone of Akin's curation.

Against the wall facing the entranceway to the platform, the center of the exhibition is inhabited by the works of Inci Furni, an artist who has recently appeared as part of the prestigious opening year of solo exhibitions at the new Arter museum. For her contribution to *Of Paper*, Furni added a site-specific installation, *Empty-Full* (2021). Her signature, full-body portraiture is shot through with empty space, effecting a certain corollary to her use of paper when propped up in rolls, yet bled through with patches of luring color schemes.

Her large, acrylic on paper, *Still Life* (2021), is anything but still. Its flowing mass of swirling, overlapping textural coloration outline a kind of psychological confusion, which could be said to evoke the present moment, in which stillness is a requisite of lockdown society. Similarly, the charcoal draftsman Kemal Özen explored the interiority of the mind, mirrored and obscured under the effects of quarantine. His series of seven works, titled, *Idego* (2021), adapts the terminology of Sigmund Freud.

On the left-wing of the whitened, cubic exhibition space at Ferda Art Platform, there are works by Fatoş Irwen. She has mapped restricted space, camps and complexes, interconnected with strings of hair pinned down on nine crumpled sheets of packaging paper. What appears, from a distance, like a cold architectural blueprint, is, by a closer examination, the emotional contiguity of open rooms. The artist seems to have interrogated herself in writing. In a fine black pen, she asks, “What is human?” or “Where is my body?”

March 2, 5:42 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Social

*The Big Picture* is an exhibition in Istanbul, at the new Arter museum, which, although it opened in the fall of 2019, remains a fresh locale on the art map of a city that has more tricks up its sleeves for intrepid localists and globetrotters out for that vital cultural experience, where the perceptual meets the conceptual. Its curator, Selen Ansen, who has shown her knack for group shows and performance art at the spectacular building along an inner-city freeway in the Dolapdere quarter of the city's Beyoğlu district, exhibits a slew of works spanning the career of German artist Klaus Peter Brehmer with a special breadth and tact that could very well appear in the halls of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York or the Tate in the UK.

Exhaustive as it is intriguing, *The Big Picture* does justice to the idea of seeing as a form of reading. KP Brehmer dealt in the language of graphs and charts, compositions and adverts with a characterful poise, stimulating his seers with a peculiarly German sensibility for social reconciliation in an era of worldwide reform. His artwork is a nod to a generation of progressive Germans who emerged in the decades following World War II as the world leaned forward with so many unanswered questions in the wake of unprecedented, mass, criminal atrocity masked by the guise of war and its moral personification as the forces of good and evil.

Born in 1938, the year Europe braced for full-scale armed conflict under the shadow of Third Reich imperialism, KP Brehmer came to embody the growing pains of a nation that had regressed against the global momentum toward the democratization of national citizenries. It is a paradigm that remains as prescient as ever, having defined much of what continues, unresolved, in its aftermath, however, obscured by the propaganda of ethnic ideography. Before the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Brehmer had his start copying and reproducing documents, becoming a reprography technician. His early training is fundamental to his oeuvre.

The creative liberalism of the 1960s in West Berlin was a formative time for Brehmer, where he crystallized his place among the city's pantheon of artists, chumming around with names now famous, including Joseph Beuys and Naim June Paik, both of whose works are presented by Arter at the concurrent show, *For Eyes That Listen*. Since his collaboration with Rene Blok in 1964, Brehmer has been associated with specific art movements defined as neo-dada, pop, and capitalist realism. Into the 1970s, particularly beside curator Manfred Schneckenburger, Brehmer addressed the art world from documenta 6, a quinquennial contemporary art exhibition in Germany, on the topic of social realism.

Brehmer's complex, distinctive relationship to political or social didacticism as an artist might best be understood by his self-naming. He discarded his birth name, Klaus Peter, and went under the initials KP, which stood for the initials of the Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei) in Germany, to which he never belonged. It is often the case that artists utilize the language of sociopolitical concern, only to subvert its intent and meaning towards a more subjective turn, emphasizing individual and collective reinterpretation. Its catalyst for change therein would be as



unpredictable as the mass of experience out of which it is molded, reflecting something of the hypocrisies of objective human self-reflection.

The cultural implications of free-market capitalism have arguably never been so starkly posed than on either side of the Berlin Wall. In the curatorial assessment of Arter, Brehmer is not so much didactic as he is “educative” which is the word they use. In other words, his is not a superficial art, a surface design by which to see the profane and mundane more abstractly. Instead, Brehmer assumed and adapted the power play of civilizational oneness, positioning himself, even if with critical reflexivity, while enjoying the privileges that came with being a white, male West German citizen in the late twentieth century.

One of the opening pieces at *The Big Picture* is a pair of flags on the wall, bearing the German colors, only with their distribution on the canvas adjusted according to proportions of wealth disparity. The piece is reminiscent of work by the Germany-based Turkish artist duo Özlem Günyol and Mustafa Kunt, especially their “Materialistic Painting” series from 2018 in which they presented the value of a coin flattened over a canvas for a decidedly pop art effect. Within the image, these works could be said to express the tenets of capitalist realism, which set out to justify the role of art in transforming daily, consumer aesthetics to reflect new ideas.

In 1963, in his mid-twenties, as a newborn chrysalis in the humming contemporary art field that was postwar Germany, Brehmer bought a printing press. With applied techniques in linocut, woodcut and metal stereotypes, he produced his “cliche” prints. They enjoyed broad exposure at Rene Block’s gallery by the time Brehmer exhibited, *Trivial Aesthetics* in 1965. The idea of presenting utterly copyable material, images and styles in an art context was preceded by the French art world, by such artists as Yves Klein and Marcel Duchamp. And yet Brehmer stood out for his meticulous approach to redrafting the designs of national industries.

Drawn from the KP Brehmer Collection and Estate in Berlin, the first hall of the expansive multi-room course of *The Big Picture* includes a series of stamps. Brehmer would return to certain themes, from his critique of imperialist American capitalism from Vietnam to the White House, and Russia’s late communism within the same frame as that of his more reflexive sensitivity, to the image-generation that has continued to reference the portraits of Adolf Hitler or Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as fundamental to the visual consciousness of the prevailing zeitgeist. Berlin is not immune to his visual criticism, which going back to 1965 he framed via a postcard rack.

There is a “cliche” work, titled, *Graziella*, wrapped in lace, based on the 1852 novel by Alphonse de Lamartine, which has its own history of influencing paintings, and exudes an air of soft intercultural appropriation between Western nations, as a kind of romance told through fictions, poems and paintings. The prolific energy of his early years is cleanly exhibited at Arter, conveying the productivity of the young Brehmer at work with his printing press. The overall aesthetic is characteristically pop, yet, by collaging and overlapping alternatives to linear logic, he affects a neo-dada chaos that could be well suited to the realities of disaster capitalism.

The psychology of consumer possession establishes a clear line from Brehmer at a time when Andy Warhol was enlightening the art world into a mainstream business that might be confused by an outsider as another form of cultural advertising. His varicolored studies of eyes and canned products appear to have a direct link to Warhol; yet it is not rudely stolen out of the archives of old, but a fresh, contemporary parallel. There are other art history quotations more expressed, such as in his 1971 piece, *Colour Geography (Shades of Blue) After Mondrian* during an era in his career, toward the early 1970s, in which he carefully trained his vision on the nature of color as a prosaic, objectifying device of coded description.

March 11, 2:06 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Borderline

In a recent conversation with artist Barış Doğrusöz, art historian and archaeologist Zainab Bahrani discussed legitimization as a form of exclusion. Bahrani is widely esteemed as the Edith Porada professor of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, New York. She is one of the world's foremost experts on the extant material legacy of Mesopotamia as the sociopolitical sway of its ancient remnants continues to blur the lines of authority and heritage between Turkey, Syria and Iraq.

As an appreciator of the works that Doğrusöz produced for his Salt show, comprising three videos, Bahrani addressed an enduring concern that has been an underlying theme when thinking about the Orientalist frame of postcolonial archaeological history, namely the relevance of excavation finds and their significance to local communities in excavated regions. His trilogy, *Sandstorm and the Oblivion* (2017) and *Beneath Crowded Skies* (2019), are rounded out with a piece specially designed for Salt's diamond series, *Cross-Pollinated* (2020).

Bahrani confessed her obsession with the lived experience of the earthly landscapes that archaeology has confined to abstruse academic practice, removed from what might be conceived toward more organic, inclusive forms of canonization and archiving in correspondence with everything from graffiti to looted objects. Doğrusöz and Bahrani are pointing to the idea that satellite imagery forms a direct line of imposed knowledge systems with that of colonial archaeology.

In his latest work, *Cross-Pollinated*, immediately across from the entranceway to the hall wherein his triptych is exhibited at Salt Galata, Doğrusöz gleaned specific footages from the Corona spy satellite. Declassified since 1992, the American surveillance operation photographed west Asian countries under the territorial influence of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. In eleven minutes, the video conveys the flux of urbanization, industrialization and war as part of the ongoing erosion of the ancient settlement of Deir el-Zour, eastern Syria.

The curation of *Cross-Pollinated* at Salt Galata has a tech gothic air, as it flashes from three rectangles that float in space, connected to each other, forming an incomplete, yet concerted moving image. The sound of the other two videos merges together, for a chaos as unsettling as the cold, inhuman sense of distance from the past that Western methods of knowledge acquisition exact. *Cross-Pollination* is a negative, oversaturated nightmare, as its subtitles read, "We were trained not see the people in these pictures as human."

*Locus of Power* sets a particularly erudite tone for the coming five artists who will be featured as part of Salt's tenth anniversary exhibition series, "The Sequential." The precedent of the institution is a regional beacon for the advancement of the arts on the forefront of interdisciplinary research, changing the nature of visual, textual and social historiographies,

prompting vital dialogues with regards to Turkey's interdependence but also ambivalence towards both Middle Eastern and European orientations.

Doğrusöz, as a Turkish artist based in Beirut, embodies the distinctive geopolitical perspective of Turkey as both separate and intimate with its surrounding countries. The grayscale aerial imagery of *Cross-Pollination* is noetic and hypnotic, depicting the desertification of lands neglected, destroyed and reclaimed. Within the bleak abstractions, bird's-eye views punctuated by the photography of migratory flocks, the structures of a fortress reappear out of the sand.

In response to the effects of war as a force that polarizes people, compelling previously unified societies to draw lines and take sides, Doğrusöz is essentially using the alternative narrative symbology and spatial-temporal contexts of ancient urban architecture as a reference point by which to trace the movement of power's concentration. Expelled from their homelands in unprecedented numbers, the experience of contemporary Syrians reverberates against the backdrop of civilizational abandonment.

*Cross-Pollination*, however, is not a mere dust-covered whim to fancy the primordial zeitgeist of the ancient remains around Deir el-Zour, but an exercise in the inherent creativity of mechanical reproduction, in its literal meaning, and as applied to the realm of the prevailing technologically-suffused cultural moment. There are vast, millennia of recurrent patterns in time and space that Doğrusöz has attempted to capture through video. The soft, yet dynamic lapse of planetary transformation in the age of oil is a transhistorical act of physical appropriation.

With the mind of a documentary filmmaker, yet stylized as vessels of archival research, Doğrusöz aspired to adapt twentieth-century representations within the politicized, technological ecology around Deir el-Zour in an utterly current frame, to amass a new archive that might instill researchers with the advantage that their future critical scholarly and creative works would be colored by the changing socio-cultural fabric of these territories which, by the slanted recording of history, has ever been defined by contest, conflict and imposition.

The unending struggles for popular, territorial sovereignty in the Levant, then, could be said to be based on agencies of representation, in other words, who defines identity, boundary and history itself. Doğrusöz is an artist who impresses the sprawling urgency of such disciplines as archaeology to lend an ear to the voiceless. Bahrani has curated shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art when not packing for fieldwork within Mesopotamian war zones. Her appreciation of Doğrusöz, on the cusp of abstraction, signifies a grand paradigm shift.

His eight-plus minute video, *Sandstorm and Oblivion* (2017), projects slides of stills over an automated narrator's voice elucidating a colonial-era story in which British soldiers in the Syrian countryside stumbled upon works of art. Yet, their discoveries were quickly eclipsed by an abrupt and absolute disconnect from the locality in which it was seen, and came to form an impression on Western consciousness. But the defining enigma lies in how its past is lost to gaps in knowledge, archiving history that has since formed across its immediate grounds.

The overarching accent is, then, not a question of postcolonial critique, but a return to emphasizing the absence of localization. There is a curious attribute across the video trilogy of Doğrusöz for *Locus of Power*, that of unpeopled lands reduced, emptied, rendered, whether in modern times or prehistory. The narrated texts, such as in *Beneath Crowded Skies* (2019), speak of tales and ideas, stretching the breadth of ventures in archaeological theft alongside Mesopotamia's rich visual mythologies. *Locus of Power* bears an inward darkness, cerebral and imaginative, like the warning lights of a slow emergency, illuminating the outline of escape.

March 18, 7:06 PM

Istanbul, Turkey

## Runaway

For her show at Sanatorium, a distinctly progressive gallery in Istanbul's art world, Agnès Guillaume relayed the mystic beauty of introspection. *Let's Escape*, the title of the exhibition, is a light touch, a graceful caress of insight into the ethereal realms of thought, night and nature, both earthly and universal. Hers is a voice that retains personality, yet remains poised at a quiet distance, somehow elegantly meek, reticent, like a thought that flits here and there in the mind, evading capture. The role of the artist in that sense could be not necessarily to possess thought, to transform it into a commodified product of experience, but to run away with it, even to oblivion.

On entering the cool space, uniquely suited to screenings, as its interior is obscured behind its long storefront window, the initial video *Four My's - My Nights* (2014) is displayed, featuring the artist's pale visage, of milk and starlight, basking in the placid air of light opaquely overlapped by doves in flight, their feathers photographed and rendered negative. The avian emblem of white peace is blackened, crow-like and eyeless. It flaps, at first singly, then increasingly, until her image is overrun, entirely, by an influx of fluttering winged bodies.

It was during her show *4My's+* at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium when Sanatorium decided to curate her works for a special solo exhibition in Istanbul. *Four My's - My Nights* is very much of a whitening aesthetic, softly focused, diminishing into a pleasant fog. Her face contrasts with that of birds, perhaps symbolic of her mind, or personality, in relation to her body, or that of herself in relation to her thoughts. The sense of clarity is absent, but its absence is replaced by a levity, an unseeable beauty.

About halfway through *Four My's - My Nights*, Guillaume, self-portrayed in the background of the birds in flight, opens her eyes. Toward the hyperactive, busy conclusion of the five-minute piece, in which a flock of birds hovers in place over the image of her face, she has opened her eyes wide, and they are clear, flashing bright and piercing through the overwhelming chorus of black wings in motion. For her debut in Turkey, Guillaume has converged the European museum and Istanbul gallery worlds with a delicate harmony.

On the opposite side of the panel exhibiting *Four My's - My Nights* is the accompanying piece *Four My's - My Thoughts* (2016-2017). The interior of Sanatorium darkens all the more towards the back of the installation for *Let's Escape* and its cavernous recesses amplify the effect of *Four My's - My Thoughts*, which conveys a spatial levity that borders on a kind of magical realism. The artist is again part of the work, only as a full-body, photographed in an aquarium-like realm, transposed against a background of outer space.

*Four My's - My Thoughts* emanates a fluorescent lightness, so as to impart, whether intentionally or not, a quiet sense of humor. The artist is blindfolded, and leaping, in slow-motion off of the backs of jellyfish, floating in a cosmic pool of sense-deprived contemplation. Guillaume enacts a serious playfulness, as the degree of quality in the production of her videos accentuates the

heights of frivolity. A jellyfish appears, suddenly, out of the inky mist, and another moment, she emerges from its suction-cup anatomy, materialized of mystery.

Beside her second video work for *Let's Escape* are six stills, gleaned from *Four My's - My Thoughts*. They are double-printed on Japanese paper, visibly luminous within walnut-framed, dimmed lightboxes. The starkness of black and white defines the minimal aesthetic of her videography, so as to accentuate the vibrancy of their contrast. Her whites glow, alive with fluid wonder, and her blacks are awe-inspiring chasms, abundances of space, all-embracing. And in her stills, *Thoughts #1 - #2 - #3 - #4 - #7 - #8*, she assumes the shape of a bird.

And to conclude the light touch of *Let's Escape*, a whisper in the dark of the art world, rightfully timed as the long-anticipated summer approaches following another year eclipsed by the summons of pandemic, a nine-channel video, *Mineralités #1-9* (2020), encloses the show in an ecological meditation on the independence of nature, its surprising potential to catapult its admirers into worlds previously unknown, unseen, unthought. Each screen loops endlessly, yet there are only the slightest of movements in their subjects, which, rock-like, merely vibrate.

From the bottom left, and going around to the middle, the video's screen points of semi-  
abstraction, hints of a perspective that blends into a grander environmental milieu, if obscured by colorations of photographic limitation. With *Mineralités*, Guillaume has adopted a nonfigurative, while still representational approach to landscape, as a microcosm of anthropocentric myopia, the limits of human perception. Yet, a seer might wonder, if, in fact, Guillaume attempted to portray the way stones might see, unfiltered, including obstructions.

Submerged in surrealist impressions of naturalist videography, earthly and celestial, Guillaume has posed a singular variety of artworks to reflect the mutual sources of influence that exist within the round of relationships between human life, particularly its mental interiority, and that of other forms of life, entangled in seemingly unrelated, or uncommunicable networks. Nature, to Guillaume, perhaps, is not a gross, physical web of bodily acts, but more like the involuntary expression of thoughts that spring from the bewildering course of normal brain activity.

Whether of a dove, jellyfish or mineral, in water, space, on land, Guillaume has traversed surface consciousness with *Let's Escape*, asking seers if it is even possible to open the windows of personal thought in the language of images alone. But as the art historian and writer Paul Ardenne has written about her works, "Guillaume speaks only of us, humans." Ardenne refers to Nietzsche to pose art as a tonic in the midst of runaway modernism, in which "art is an idiom that demands and deserves attention."

March 25, 10:39 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Awoken

The opposable thumb marks an evolutionary leap, by which, it is widely held, technological advances could be grasped by the prevailing human species, allowing for as yet unrivaled predominance over the carnivorous biomass that swarmed across the fields and valleys, seas and skies of the prehistoric world. From the use of a large bone to thwack a predator down millions of years ago, to typing out last night's home delivery, the peculiarly strengthened musculature around the appendage has rooted much causality in human life.

Its form reappears in *Phase: Repair*, an exhibition by Görkem Ergün, whose works are slightly repulsive, if not enigmatic, pointed and yet elusive. In fact, an opposable thumb sticks out of the first of seventeen hand-tinted offset plates on which Ergün's vintage photographic aesthetic greets seers once having ascended the old stairs to Martch Art Project, a tenement gallery in the heart of Beyoğlu, just a short alleyway away from Istiklal Avenue in Istanbul. It is, like the Mısır Apartment galleries, and Poşe's residential space, part of Istanbul's quirky downtown art map.

Within the bijou interior of Martch Art Project, there are five ample spaces, contiguously aligned and open to each other by various entrances. The lofty hall is enticing for its warmth, evoking a community air, personable and yet retaining all of the intellectual refinements of a contemporary arts establishment. Most of the works at *Phase: Repair* are untitled, except for two video works, one of which, *pumphumb* (2021), displays an eight-second duration that loops as projected by the screen of a tablet.

The Frankenstein-like ambiance of *pumphumb* also invokes early Tim Burton, as the side finger of evolutionary renown moves, self-propelled, wound by a mechanical ring, over a flat surface, and keels over, spewing and convulsing. Ergün might have adopted something of the mad scientist's allure for the show that is as inviting as it is frightful. His is a world of the chemist's experimental darkroom, exposing the fleshy forms of silicone with an eye for the careful subtleties of material transparency by way of light's constant play with darkness.

In the second video work, across from *pumphumb*, Ergün explores a less explicit objectification of image, yet one that is as closely intertwined with the illuminated metaphysics of bodily form. *New Matter* (2021) is a two-plus minute meditation on the cylindrical nature of limbs, fingers and torso-like shapes, where knotted, whether by a knee, joint or belly button, comes to a point. *New Matter*, however, like most of the works, excepting that of his thumbs, is not clearly discernible in reference to anything or any anatomy in particular.

Within the varieties of organic forms that Ergün envisions anew with his technical infusion of creative originality are faces, or truer, heads. They are bulky masses, partly decayed yet conveying a real sense of weight. Together with his more ethereal subjects, some of which look like carob stems, they stand out, like excavated mummies, glaring back with blacked-out eye sockets, hairless to the skull, yet with puckering full lips and animate, if stark expression. One example is seemingly held up by the silhouette of a hand.



And here and there, where a more figurative piece hangs, either suspended or nailed to the whitewash walls, there are abstractions, powdery, watery. Another face, beaming from its eyes with neon-tube luminescences looks up at an airy impression, like glue or condensation. Perhaps the sharpest of his images, most of which are tinged with vagueness, are connected to the ceiling and serve as the foreground against a wall of DNA sequencing. The ambiance befits the overall scientific, microscopic gaze.

There is a quiet vision of mortality, and age in Ergün's photographic meditations, which might be conceived as parallel to that of Yusuf Murat Şen's archival excavations in which the professor rewrites the history of photography like a revisionist by altering found exposures. While Ergün's works are almost completely devoid of setting, they both dance on the silver surface of mechanical image-making. In the context of art, photographic artists, whether consciously or not, consistently beg the question of just how creation differs from reproduction.

If seeing is a metaphor for understanding, and clarity its accomplice, then Ergün is an explorer in the opposite of sight, the opposability of a thumb serving as a symbol, perhaps for the necessity of contrast to propel physicality and meaning. In basic terms, *Phase: Repair* is a series of negatives, yet in one room at Martch Art Project, there are samples of his venturing in the realms of color and blankness. In the context of the show, the fine art prints, also untitled, offer atmospheric depth, textural and spectral contradistinction.

In the accompanying text for the exhibition, Istanbul-based art writer Murat Alat made an effort to wrap his mind around the idea of wording the visual sphere of Ergün's decidedly nonrepresentational evocations. The two paragraphs distilled by Martch Art Project, serving as a conceptual frame by which to glimpse the inner world of Ergün are searching, about as indefinite and inconclusive as the images they have sought to capture. The shortcomings of Alat's capable writerly intellect are indicative of Ergün's utterly elusive oeuvre.

At the same time, for all of his apparent obliqueness and flirtation with abstraction, Ergün is arguably not an abstract artist in the least, but a manufacturer of enigmas where the fields of portraiture and background merge. If his artworks were music, they might drone with early waves of synth electronica, as he has mined the machine-like contours of the body, reflecting the internal anatomies of his chosen media. As Alat deftly remarked, "Fearing shadows in which black and white intertwine is valid only for those who hide behind walls."

In a cultural climate of economic desperation, in which lines form around the block to see the blockbuster dazzle of technologically-suffused light art, and museums and galleries reconfigure the virtual dimensions of entertaining a largely remote public, the presence of a small gallery show like *Phase: Repair* is a treasure island of genuine, local dedication to a more traditional nexus of contemporary art appreciation, approachable while remaining true to its roots, underground amid the abstruse yearnings of the past century's mechanical imagination.

The Empire Project practices a decentralization of art curation, in which an artist's work is not bound to a single place, according to the spatial fixture of particular galleries. Instead, led by Kerimcan Gülyüz and Sena Pekiner, their diverse cast of often emerging artists travel throughout the city, for exhibitions in collaboration with a number of host institutions, among them Martch Art Project. Ergüner is on his fourth solo exhibition with *Phase: Repair*, and although his works may shoot in the dark, they are enveloped by an increasingly enlightened tone of curatorial and critical insight.

April 2, 10:13 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Else

In his posthumous, *Letters to a Young Poet* (1929), the fin de siècle German-language Bohemian poet Rainer Maria Rilke had no patience for criticism, and less for journalism. In the last of his ten letters to a nineteen-year-old officer cadet in the Austrian military, he lauded the boy for not stooping to the “unreal half-artistic professions” which “pretend to be close to art” and “in practice deny and attack the existence of all art”. In his poetry, Rilke thought of himself as bound to the visual arts, more than music.

Such is the case with his two-part collection, *New Poems*, which Dirimart’s curator, Ceren Erdem quoted for the title of the current, group show, *All Else Is Far*. The phrase appears in the third part of the poem, *Island*, which, in the elliptical lucidity of Rilke embodies the human will to press forth, unknowingly, on earth as in the stars. It is a feeling that conjures the intensity of loneliness, at the edge of life, when existence comes to a point, a decision of just how to get on.

That poetic desperation is at the core of *All Else Is Far*, its metaphysical sentimentality beautifying with a visceral lurch through the noosphere. The curation is an utterly sensitive one, nothing of the slapdash agglomeration of objects that characterizes many group shows, which can seem utterly arbitrary, a critique that, in fact, came to haunt Rilke himself after publishing *New Poems* in 1907. That arbitrariness Rilke was defending as a form of selfhood, as each poem was a thing unto itself, an artwork likened to a Rodin sculpture or Cezanne canvas.

Erdem has swung back around, perhaps, to configure the placement of apparently unrelated works of visual art into a literal course of shared meanings in which the *raison d’être* behind each work both alone and in relation to all of the others is accentuated and renewed from every point of their respective placements and interior monologues. It could be argued, however, that the relatively esoteric significance of each piece is an apt metaphor for solitude, in objectified isolation and yet obliquely together, despite their immediate aesthetic values.

Dirimart has a wall, facing the doorway, often used to preface exhibitions with works that provide a glimpse, a light touch, something evocative yet somehow hidden, so as to whisper a hint of what is to come. Such is the effect of the untitled oil painting by Furkan Akhan against the surface, painted a vibrant orange, identical to that of an elegant, plushly upholstered chair turned around. It is not difficult to imagine the likes of the Godfather, or Morpheus, on the other side, clicking worry beads, awaiting their next guest.

And to add to the domestic flair, Erdem placed works by Sarkis Zabunyan and Yasemin Özcan beside that of Akhan. *Desire* (2020) by Özcan is a piece of sculptural theater, evoking the subtling of thoughts that would occur as two beloveds are seated for their morning breakfast and while in the midst of passing the butter, are, in fact, navigating inundations of emotive thought, trained on the other, reflecting their inmost mysteries. The simple ceramics lain on a balcony table are engraved with sayings like, “the weather is hot,” irresistibly familiar. And Sarkis, with his photograph that emanates on one side with LED light, turning the two-

dimensional into an image-sculpture with his characteristic visual vocabulary, explores an interiority abstrusely related to his upbringing. The room is enclosed, one window blocked with bricks, uncanny to so many of Istanbul's born-and-bred city dwellers, like Sarkis himself, raised and stretching upward for light like plants with stems bent toward the window. There is a solid weightiness to his capture, unpeopled, like a vacant memory, semi-imagined and lingering.

Wrapping around the introductory hall, *All Else Is Far* opens out to an invitation of bodies exposed, both explicitly and by visual inference. Yet, these exhibitions are not garish but instead imbue their seers with the definition and essence of their making, and presence, effervescent with the ingenuity of their creators, the artists whose disparate and interdependent universes meet at points, like a full-blown kiss, or an unwelcome graze. Others are gestures that elude physicality, like the wood sculpture by Can Küçük, *Both* (2015). *Both* comprises two stools. One of them is cut, diagonally, at the leg, and that piece is then upturned and set in the middle of the seat of the other, rendering them both useless. As a whole work of art, they need each other. In that process, practicality is lost. It is that superfluity that makes humanity human. On the reverse side of the opening wall, a surreal figment of the nonfigurative drapes, curiously, exuding its artist's rudderless, improvisatory approach to painting with mixed media on found surfaces, in the case of *Untitled* (2021), craft paper.

Perhaps one of the more didactic works at *All Else Is Far* is by Ayça Telegren, whose forty-second video loop, *First Encounter After Break Up* shows two pairs of hands clawing at the sand where the sea water washes ashore. The overarching push and pull of the tide has its resonance in the back and forth of the waves that break over the earth, and out of that rhythm, yogic and fundamental to material existence, a couple reaches for each other, their grasp weakening as they pull back, and exit the frame.

In certain places, the works of *All Else Is Far* mirror the relationships of their artists, as, for example, Güçlü Öztekin and Güneş Terkol, partners in work and life, as the wall painting of the former faces the embroidered fabric of the latter, hanging from the ceiling. The filmmaker and photographer Nuri Bilge Ceylan has a work, *Sleepless Night* (2008), in which he pictured an intimate moment of his late father, at the end of his life, eyes wide in bed, elderly, and facing death's approach. Ceylan filmed his father throughout his career, building a special relation to the image of his maker. To add historical depth to the show, assistant curator Levent Özmen tipped Erdem on an oil painting from 1986, by a lesser-known Turkish artist named Celal Tutant. His canvas, titled, *On the Sofa*, is of a contorted human figure, asleep on a couch built for one. The nighttime emotionality of its scene is universal, instantly recognizable, especially to anyone who lives on their own, common among artists whose lives are often defined by how they grapple with the demons of loneliness when the momentums of society feel exactly opposed to the originality in their hearts, and which they realize through courageous acts of work, perseverance and survival.

April 9, 11:49 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Fluidity

The organic phenomenon of fluidity has become fundamental to the expression and pursuance of millennial identity, both individually and collectively, as social roles and their meanings interchange and evolve according to a constant flux of new dialogue between people who, in the past, would not have had a chance to speak or to say exactly what is on their minds, and in the process, earn the reception of a broad, attentive public listenership.

The liquid metaphor poses a sense of environmental immersion, which is prescient in light of current climate science. The idea of fluidity, in art and society, forecloses the history of understanding nature on human terms and reimagines the human body and psychology on nature's terms. While the definitions that separate humans from nature are subject to critique, the origin mysteries of progressive predominance and self-consciousness remain intact.

The show *Fluid Dynamics*, curated by Özge Yılmaz, brings together a variety of works made by young and seasoned artists alike in past years that, when seen together, reflect a growing milieu of artistic, ecological integration. Less concerned with abstraction and aesthetics than the creative science of relationships formed in concert with living habitats through the practice of skilled crafts, the eight artists explore the intimate mutuality of earthly existence.

Most immediate is a video installation by Sibel Horada, whose sensitivity to symbolism in nature is apparent in her clear and green oeuvre. *Flow* (2019) is a three-minute loop of a grainy, black-and-white waterfall housed within an LED screen that rests atop piles of what the artist calls "excavations," but which appear to be the ruins of a constructed building, as fragmented concrete blocks reach out with twisted metal rods that once held them together.

Horada's *Flow* presents intriguing contradistinction, playing on the common notion of nature as reality and the artificial, whether a construction project or a work of art, as somehow different, reflective of the peculiarly human penchant to alter and transcend realness. The scenic, verdant beauty of waterfalls, surrounded by trees and mountains is oblique because it is, in fact, a video screen. What is real lies below: smashed, misshapen blocks.

The installation has a curious relation to that of Istanbul-born, Berlin-based architect Yelta Köm, whose video installation *Possibilistic Grounds* (2021) further investigates the mineral connection to fluidity. Köm has honed his sights on lead. A suspended, flat monitor hangs above a topographic mound of black granules covered meticulously with the contours of a model highland landscape.

*Possibilistic Grounds* moves from waterfalls to mountains to show how the seemingly immovable heights of towering crimps in tectonic plates are suffused with liquidity and retain elements of its coursing. From within, by heating the ore of its stone, the mountain has literally fluid energy. In the word "liquify," assets become debts in a way similar to capitalist industry, where a mountain may boil down to a sum of currency.

Horada produced *Flow* in 2019 as part of programming for SAHA Studio, which was also the case for a piece called *The Way* (2019-2020) by Alper Aydın. In Istanbul and Izmir, having found startlingly bucolic locations, overarched with the canopies of healthy forests, Aydın stepped into a stream and for a substantial length of time, patiently sculpted a spiraling pattern within a circle made of clay.

The eight-plus minutes of *The Way* documented the artist's dedication to the sacred geometry of symmetrical, aesthetically pleasing forms that, unlike the "excavations" beneath *Flow* speak to a higher order of creativity than that of pure utility, toward the visualization of idea as reason. Between the works of Aydın and Horada, waters, real and digital respectively, run through manifestations of human civilization, its persistence and ruin.

From the Aegean coast, artist Emine Boyner Kürşat has affected an especially holistic alchemical notion, one that is not dusty with medieval historiography but that continues, despite the historical regressions of human thought, in the depths of the sea. She has focused on oysters for their natural ability to subsume and refine their environment. Her polished ceramic sculptures are not only well shaped but dyed by her own resourceful efforts.

Gathering plants and berries, and distilling their colors, Kürşat painted the underside of her oysters' clay pink, resonating with the earthy tones of the piece by Aydın. In the hallway of Versus Art Project, an attribute shared among the old apartments housing galleries, such as at Poşe, Daire or Martch Art Project in Istanbul, Kürşat spread out a long painting on paper, using her own blends of wild-harvested dragon berry and wood ink.

Under electric pink lighting, *Rooted* (2020) shows a succession of trees, framing their bold, gnarled trunks. Their wide bodies resemble the mushroom clouds of atom bombs detonated across a post-apocalyptic desert. With a certain eye, they have a watery mold, as waterfalls upside-down, flowing up from the ground. The surreality of her light sketches is well paired with a VR film *Floodplain* (2020) by New York-based Deniz Tortum.

Due to the pandemic, VR headsets are banned, and so, the result is all the more eccentric from normative perception. It follows the fictional plot of villagers lost in the woods, beginning with four people, sleeping in the shadow of a stunted tree that shape-shifts, dreamlike, as they lay on the mossy, viridescant soil. Together with Kürşat's vibrant oysters, and hair weavings by Horada, *Fluid Dynamics* has a fairy-tale mystique.

The show is grounded by one of the younger artists, Berka Beste Kopuz, whose series, *Untraceable* (2021) follows a site-specific installation, set within a closet of space inside Versus Art Project, a world within a world that comments on the disappearance of underground streams in Istanbul. Kopuz's piece is a powerful, investigative work on the destruction wrought by overburdened urbanization as it affects not only the quality but the existence of water.

If Istanbul were a person, they would be dehydrated. In metaphorical terms, the lack of fluidity is indicative of a social comment that, through criticisms and solutions, the eight artists at Versus Art Project have grappled with, as curated in enlightened detail by Yılmaz. There is an especially emotional work in photographs of a performance piece by Gülhatun Yıldırım, who is shown prostrating, offering a lit candle, to a carafe of water. She is pleading, as she pours it over herself, for its return, within and without.

April 16, 11:57 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## After

A buck is flanked by five meerkats and a rabbit. Under its impressive antler spikes, and from its wise, black eyes, it stares back at the painter as he morphs thickly lathered white oil with a technique that integrates elements of drawing and engraving. Seydi Murat Koç is confronting his imagination of life in Istanbul following the worst-case scenario for humanity. Unpeopled, and overgrown, his scenes of Istanbul are freshly green, shot through with the illuminations of an ecology rejuvenated to the fullness of its original, natural state. The land of the abandoned city teems with plants and animals, and yet, they have newly returned.

The canvas is titled, *The Day After Series 3* (2021), and it shows a bucolic, verdant Istiklal Avenue, without the tourist shoppers and their bags and crowds. The famed trolley has stopped in its tracks, which are sprouting with multicolored grass. In the painting, the sky is not visible, but a powerful degree of light suffuses the landscape, as with all of Koç's canvases in his solo show, *The Day After*. The turn-of-the-century Greek-owned buildings of downtown Istanbul are detailed with special finesse by Koç, who is an adept draftsman. His work, however, rather than dystopian, is conceivably optimistic.

*The Day After* goes beyond the extent of forewarning, and offers a glimpse into a world that has healed from the overpopulation of its formerly predominant species. It could be seen as a psychological gesture, in that sense, toward a vision of planetary existence in which the stresses of continuity, of lurching toward progress by force are relaxed, or released entirely. By his technical approach, specifically his lavish use of white paint, Koç has affected a photographic exercise in color positivity, reversing the transformation of the negative so as to show the permeable brilliance of form, when the artificial becomes naturalistic.

In terms of art history, the paintings of Koç bear a post-impressionistic air as the swirling fields of Van Gogh are traced over the aftermath of Istanbul's human extinction. Another piece set on Istiklal Avenue, *The Day After Series 7* (2021) zooms out to reveal a flowing, cloudy atmosphere, mirroring the shapes of the treetops. Within the mass of whitened green tufts, as leaves meld and merge like water, the red trolley is immersed, unmoving in the middle of the pedestrian road lined with empty buildings. Koç, with his prolific use of white, has a fine sense for its spectral reflectivity, and so, employs yellows, blues, purples lucidly. In his vision of the post-apocalyptic future, Koç paints as a comment on the longevity of architecture and art, which, in his environmental utopia, outlives humanity. What remains are figments of ideal beauty, the abstractions of plant life commingling with degradation as beautification. And yet, within one particular piece, *The Day After Series 13* (2021), a classical Grecian statue emerges from patches of silvery, frosted flowering plants overlooking a serene stretch of the Bosphorus. There is also, on the horizon, the pale semblance of a mosque, overcast with milky cloud cover.

The sculptural imagery is echoed in the sole drawing at the show, a piece made with pencil on paper titled, *The Day After Series 15* (2021). Another Greco-Roman statue has surfaced in the inner-city wilderness where one of the suspension bridges lunges over the Bosphorus, eerily



empty. It is in the drawing where the titular concept, *The Day After* is clear, as a flag still waves in the background of the scenography that Koç has visualized with the astute eye of a witness to the end of human presence on Earth, or at least what it might look like considering the opportunities that have arisen to increase biodiversity in the face of global lockdowns. Koç has essentially color-coded the evolutionary pattern of ecological entropy, in which green is the all-encompassing, oceanic principle that swallows and redirects industrial citification and, for that matter, figurative modernism in art, back to a primordial state of naturalist abstraction. Such is the case with his canvas, *The Day After Series 2* (2021). A car has been abandoned on the side of the road, and is disappearing into a wave of vital hues, emerald and lime, against a pinkish cityscape contrasted with a cloudless azure. Although made with oil paint, the meticulous detail is every bit as focused as a line drawing.

For all of its post-human timelessness, certain pieces in *The Day After* convey a sense of historical logic and narrative, as well as emulating a scientific study in the fields of biology and geology. Whether an extraterrestrial observer, or an archaeologist of modernity, Koç is, like a seasoned writer, savvy in the wisdom that showing is more potent than telling. His canvas, *The Day After Series 18* (2021) striates the subterranean depths below the roots of a tree, including rectangular objects, fragments of a commodity chain or urban infrastructure, surreal in their juxtaposition with vibrantly colored flower petals. The symbol of a flower speaks to the full expression of being, the manifestation of inner life into that which is perceivable to others. Koç cut a series of canvases in the shapes of flowers in bloom, emphasizing the completion of their forms, bursting and rich with color and nuance. Their aesthetic balance against the whitewashed walls of Ferda Art Space makes for a harmonious curation. With four paintings, *The Day After Series 9-10-11-12* (2021), presented cumulatively, Koç exposed the layers of his work. Like pulling back a curtain, he demonstrates the use of white paint as the catalyst that moves his work from natural realism to post-impressionism. *The Day After Series 9-10-11-12* pictures varicolored flowers before and after they are overrun with white paint so as to prompt the imagination of their appearance and context.

Beyond the canvas, Koç explored mixed media pieces, such as *The Day After Series 14* (2021), of a keyboard, hanging on the wall. It has become a lawn, as grass shoots up from its keys, rendering the seemingly lifeless computer part as animate, fertile and alive as the soil of earth. Koç blended his work as a painter with that of his sculptural installations for the piece, *The Day After Series 4* (2021) on which a polyester fawn is lifting its head skyward, as its hooves are linked to a wreckage of spindly junk resting on a pile of brick, stone and sand. The striation, peaking with the beauty of life, colorful and naive, is, finally, a cathartic meditation on the life-affirming course of nature, despite the often harrowing perspective of life itself as a species on the brink of survival.

April 23, 9:55 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Shops

Downwind from the Aqueduct of Valens, built in the fourth century of the common era, there is a complex of breezy, multistory storefronts that make up one of the first experiments in strip mall architecture in Istanbul. Now flanked by swirling freeways, the capitalist optimism that ended twentieth-century globalization with Americanized free market rule has been reduced to a whimper, as so many glass storefronts at the “Istanbul Drapers Market” (IMÇ) are blank with the smudge of tape detailing their abrupt closure, or slow reopening.

At the fifth block of IMÇ, a trio of young artists is sitting in conversation. Among them is Can Küçük, who is tasked with overseeing operations at 5533 for the first half of the year. Titled after the block number of the shop room where it is based, 5533 has the ambiance of a warehouse factory. Cem Örgen, who studied industrial product design, produced a diverse and ultramodern installation, *You Can't Hide in the Sky*, incorporating computer games, camouflage painting and sculptural elements.

Küçük, whose works play on the histories and manufacturing of readymade art and decorative furniture, examines elements of the industrial environment in his practice. As a point of site-specific consciousness, he made a door ringer out of a hard-coiled metal spring which hangs from the ceiling behind the entryway to 5533, as it swings open to the sound of a spoon clanking out of an empty rectangle. The cold, metallic assemblage is prefatory to the works of *You Can't Hide in the Sky*, which includes window blinds that resemble flat, model swords.

For the piece, *Weapon for Ephemeral Eyes*, Örgen laser-cut stainless steel into the shape of a body-length medieval saber, which inconspicuously functions as vertical blinds and stands in direct, visual dialogue with a variegated work, *Case, Keyboard, Winter*, in which a single-channel video plays on loop from a computer monitor, projecting the artist's character from the gameplay *Demon's Souls*. Örgen, born in 1996, is a gothic postmodernist with a weakness for good graphics.

As a designer, Örgen has a distant appreciation of objects, as the media through which styles and usages are pronounced, exchanged and transformed. As part of the art world and its interdisciplinary inclusivity, his installation for 5533 quietly pulses with the aesthetic and conceptual fascinations of the cultural moment, considering such concurrent shows like *Elektroizolasyon* at Arter. But Örgen does not seem to be trying to fit in, quite the opposite, his individuality is as genuine and eccentric as his reasons for doing what he does.

There's a whole and complete contiguity of ideas that run through Örgen's installation, *You Can't Hide in the Sky*, which speaks to the contrasts between movement and stillness. The use of camouflage paint, in particular, is associated with that middle ground of rest potent with a sense of anticipated compulsion. It is a fixture, and settlement, in all of its modes and expressions which defines domestic life. Yet, spun within the frame of a mind that is unable to stop floating and spinning, in search of action, Örgen's is the voice of youth, self-objectified.

One aspect of *Case, Keyboard, Winter* is a central processing unit (CPU) mainframe with mountain climbing handles affixed to the end of its legs. Every unit of the piece is handmade. The bench and table on which the monitor rests are jigsaw cut spruce, and topped with a sponge cushion, the work has an unfinished look. Room 5533 is essentially a white cube. In the center of his installation, Örgen manufactured a table out of aerated concrete. It is sculpted with a depression into the core of its surface, which makes for a medievalist, ceremonial air.

Functionality is turned on its head throughout, *You Can't Hide in the Sky*, such as where Örgen sliced an Adidas tracksuit and represented its vintage color and form in the keys of a piano. The conversion of materials into likenesses other than that normally ascribed to their original contexts is an apt motif in Örgen's installation from the beginning. Over the door, Örgen cut out a car cover, and fitted it with transport wheels. The paper-thin resemblance of the piece, *Folded Skin* requires a stretch of the mechanical imagination.

Across the selling floor of the compact shop room, Örgen applied silicone to the construction of a cable management spine so as to convey the shape of a backbone connecting the wall to the tiles. The work, titled, *Sweaty Bone*, has unassuming visibility, yet holds to the vision of its idea with certain confidence. And wrapping the ceiling lamps in medical gauze, softening their illumination, *You Can't Hide in the Sky* encompasses the commercial interior with the double-sided, mutual nature of concealment and exposure.

Örgen littered texts around his installation, which winds down a hallway under a course of polypropylene plastic sheets for the piece, *Water and Bad*, set within an aluminum profile and pockmarked with screw nuts. At the very farthest corner from the entrance to 5533, there is a stack of pages. On it, Örgen has divulged some of the psychological genesis of his artwork as an artificial, environmental metaphor for his dark relationship to the source of natural light, as reflected in how conscious he had become of the narrowness of sight, limited by the eye.

While Örgen could be said to have amplified and exaggerated the effect of industrialization on the life of the individual, Ayçesu Duran took a different approach when producing her installation for the ongoing, two-part show at 5533, simply called *Part One*. Many of the shops at the Istanbul Drapers Market sell and repair musical instruments, which Duran merges with in a creative light, placing her off-site piece, *Rast* at the end of a hallway. The term, "Rast" is a concept often used in Turkish and Persian music, which is also the synonym for the root word of "coincidence."

The immediate work, *Feeding Instrument* (2021) is performative. Once a day an automatic fish feeder releases bird seed that falls atop a bottom high-hat cymbal. There is a window beside the colorful display. Although there are birds that come and in out through an interlocking pattern of spaces in the wall, many red and brown seeds lie uneaten. And facing it is a wood canvas frame titled *Gamma* (2021), which Duran gleaned from a shopkeeper at the Istanbul Draper's Market, the former mall that has become a textile trader's market.

Unlike the alternative fringe outfits that oppose and contradict the cultural establishment with shock value and brash naivety, *Part One* at 5533 extends an order of business in the cultural sector that seeks to grasp and expand on both subtle and overt overlaps between industrial manufacturing and personal invention, between economic obligation and individual self-exploration. The unapologetically abstract gestures of Örgen and Duran are not altogether divorced from aesthetic art. The art initiative 5533 frames its appreciation with respect to professional makers in mainstream industries whose work is as subject to artistic interpretation.

April 29, 3:29 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Apartment

Özge Enginöz is a collagist, and for her project, *The Alphabet: Geometry of the Family*, she has mined passages from the classic English novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) by Virginia Woolf. In the process, her work explores the synonymic notions of seeing, visualizing, imagining, as intimately intertwined with their opposites, obscuration, denying, blinding. The latter, normally used in reference to the paralysis of eyesight, has metaphorical and aesthetic connotations carried by the artist Özgül Kahraman, who, in another section of Daire Sanat, is busy with elaborations and variations on the Braille alphabet, as part of her approach to social, sculptural installation.

In the space that Enginöz created for her practice at Daire Sanat, which is essentially the historic apartment's front salon, she tacked amalgamations of texts, strips of paper with sentences gleaned from Woolf's classic novel, in both English and Turkish, together with their correlating assemblage of images. Enginöz is a friend to space. She leaves objects hanging out in the open, something akin to the broad interpretability of Woolf's critically dynamic prose. What she exacts is a fresh reading, so as to consider the relationship between text and image, not for their outward manifestation, but as they interact in the mind.

A reader is captivated by a story when they can see the settings and characters as living, moving figments of experience, which act and are acted upon. Literature also has the capacity to stimulate the reader's sense of hearing, where pitch-perfect dialogue and the sound of the language can make for a particularly spellbinding grab of a tale, or simply as an evocation of writing. And it is just the question of what is writing itself that, perhaps, Woolf and Enginöz are discovering, as their paths meet in the world of art. The linkage between the written word and representational images is a puzzle for their apparent separation on the page.

Enginöz, however, crafts her collages with a refined sensibility for the edge of representation, its sharpness definite, yet composed within a field of figurative abstraction. There is one pair of collages that hangs above a peculiarly idiosyncratic Woolf phrasing in which her narrator suspects "some thorn in the tangle of this thought." In response to the text, Enginöz placed the picture of three tall cypress trees sideways in the middle of an empty, white piece of paper. There are two panels that could be something like walkways or windows leading to the bucolic landscape.

There is an air of early twentieth-century surrealism to the works of Enginöz, a movement in art that ran deep through the social circles of Woolf's contemporaries. It is uncanny, in fact, and speaks to the deeply resonant effect of Woolf's writing on humanity's collective, creative consciousness, that nearly a century following her penning one of her best-known books, she has infiltrated her Turkish readership in translation to the extent that Enginöz, an artist born in 1981 in the western city of Balıkesir would meticulously extract phrases from her three-hundred-plus page modernist sprawl to integrate into her artistic practice.

As a culmination of her work for *Alphabet*, Enginöz planned to craft a video book, based on the collages and excerpts that she has prepared and exhibited during the course of the current, two-month open workshop series at Daire Sanat. In her artistic practice, and in the way she holds space, Enginöz is confident in her visual work and her literary research. The result is a light touch, perhaps seeming amateurish and given to persistent imperfection, but hers is a honed, disciplined artistry that leaves room for the viewer-reader who, while eyeing her loose, complex collaged images on paper might imagine the sound of Woolf's voice or the scratching of her pen.

A reader is, in a sense, blind to the inner workings of their storyteller. They interpret the signs of language visually, firstly, listen to them in their thoughts, and depending on the degree of mental activity, imagine the scenes as they are told in the silent, invisible realm of writing. That is the departure point from which the artist Kahraman began to produce her series, *On Three Possibilities*. The first piece among her works at Daire Sanat, located immediately beside the entryway to the compact gallery space, is a clear sheet on which she affixed buttons correlating to the Braille for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The delicacy of her piece is in its transparency, the thinness of its material and subjection to foot traffic as it lies splayed across the wooden floorboards of the inner-city apartment gallery in Istanbul. There is a redolence of social action in Kahraman, who is making an apt point with respect to the art world's often insular reality in relation to those outside of it, who are as good as blind to some of the mimetic esotericism of modern and contemporary art and its history on the fringes of Western culture in Turkey. That said, however, her works are playfully approachable, as she continues to elaborate on how their nuances affect seeing eyes.

There are pearls of insight set throughout Woolf's novel that speak not only to the particular story of *To the Lighthouse*, which at face value is a light family drama. Woolf, like the fine artist that she was, used the novel as a medium to convey the conceptual ambiance of the illogical and introspective times in which she lived, in step with her fellow modernist novelists, among them James Joyce, or her predecessor Marcel Proust. So, Enginöz has enacted a parallel momentum, investigating the problem of sight, as a multivalent faculty involving multiple processes of reflection not merely physical but also psychological.

There is one piece that hangs on a metal clip as part of the *Alphabet* installation by Enginöz in which she quotes the following passage from Woolf's novel, "All that in idea seemed simple became in practice immediately complex." It is paired with a network of images that juxtapose abstractions on domestic textures with the remote vistas of inaccessible wilderness. At a point, she traced the outline of a mountainside with two images that, like the complement of works by Kahraman and Enginöz together, excavate the process of interiority which is normally subdued when considering the act of seeing as a projection, or outward connection.

The fragment of Woolf continues to describe how the visual experience of the sea is a different world for the swimmer than that of someone perched on a cliff. The contrast has a resonance with the works of Kahraman, who, among her many variations of sculptural texts written in

Braille, produced some purposefully unreadable variations. As a result, they cannot be seen but felt. The counterintuitive balance is perhaps the source of desire, that nagging feeling that is as universal as perception itself, where everything seems slightly out of reach, as traces of its light, shape and remembrance play on in the pinball machine of the brain.

May 4, 6:47 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Possession

The power of objects is a function of their appeal, and how, in the context of their importance as emblems of socio-cultural expression, they might take on a life of their own. Within the oft-spoken adage that things that are owned end up owning the owner is a nod to the inherent life of the inanimate, that while not exclusive to biology, do exhibit certain qualities that might otherwise be considered to be alive. Images, in that sense, have the potential to convey and preserve not only a source of individual vitality but that of the collective.

In the same way that no one or thing may exist solely on its own, so the compulsion to possess comes from the root of being, in solidarity with the interdependence of all seemingly disparate objects of perception. These themes are strong in Rania Matar's photograph on display at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Boston. Titled, *Orly and Ruth* (2020), the archival pigment print on baryta paper is one piece from her series, "Across the Window: Portraits During COVID-19" (2020-ongoing).

In the curatorial notes accompanying the piece, Matar, born in Beirut in 1964, is said to explore themes of cultural identity, home and separation. Orly and Ruth are two sisters, and they embrace each other, contained by the visible glass of the window through which they look back at the photographer. Their gaze, however, is not distant, but warm and even welcoming. As Matar attested, the physical barrier did not diminish the fact that they made a living, human connection during the shoot, and may have even accentuated it by their need to reach out.

As in the cinematography of Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, or the paintings of contemporary German painter Karin Kneffel, preparing images as filtered by transparent partitions, mostly a lightly perceivable, reflective window surface, Matar's work speaks to the transcendence of the public and the private, generally effected through media, but which, perhaps, is sourced in a deep need that people have to simply commune and identify with one another, despite outward differences. If there is anything that the pandemic has taught humanity, it is that everyone shares a common fate.

Orly and Ruth are family, but they also bear different skin colors. The bigger sister is dirty blonde, white-skinned and holds her little sibling, a black girl with tight-knit short braids, around the shoulders. The face of the white sister is obscured by her black sibling, who stares with bold, wide eyes through the glass reflecting a lush green bush. It is not clear, just by looking at the photograph, if the vegetation is on the side of the subject or the object, further relaying a blur of apparent opposites.

Although originally from Lebanon, Matar is based in Boston, where, after giving birth to her four children, she found her muse. She pictured tasteful moments of their privacy exposed by the silver light of her developed images. Being a mother turned Matar into a photographer, focusing mostly on Lebanese and American girls and women. The sensitivity that she brings to *Orly and*



*Ruth*, framing two kid sisters, is the result of the intimate love that she has appreciated by photographing her constant, lifelong subjects – her own children.

In the work of multidisciplinary Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum, the seamlessness of human connection is sculpted out of a delicate teacup that, like conjoined twins, is a fusion of two cups in one. Hatoum, like Matar, has a peculiarly Levantine sensibility for the merging of identity and physicality into new forms and concepts, something that has emerged naturally out a geopolitical environment where artificial constructs of monolithic, Western nationalism have been imposed on generations of inherently indefinable, multicultural societies.

*T42* (1993-1998) by Hatoum is a work of fine stoneware, which ICA Boston curated on a dedicated shelf. It is part of a thematic hall at the *i'm yours* exhibition entitled "Home Again," which includes the photography of Matar as well as works by Cindy Sherman and Nan Goldin together with Hatoum's artistic practice of transforming domestic objects into symbolic artifacts with political potency. Her personal background, as carved out of the traumas of exile, proceeds through her art, from the choice of title, to overt alterations of the familiar.

Anni Pullagura, who serves ICA Boston as their Mannion Family Curator, sought to present the works exhibited at *i'm yours*, and particularly in the "Home Again" section, considering transformations in the popular perception and experience of home during the pandemic lockdowns that have ensued since the outbreaks of COVID-19 swept the world. *T42* is a quaint object, yet one which encapsulates the drama of forced adherence to the conditions of group settlement, as citizenries bound to national and global rules of law.

In tandem, the works of Matar and Hatoum tell parallel, yet diverging stories of belonging and dependency. *Orly and Ruth* are in the midst of a tight squeeze, and their family makeup the result of choice, while, in Hatoum's piece, *T42* evokes a permanent, irreversible bond, like that of a unique person to their geographical birthplace and cultural identity in relation to others. While Matar's image has a sweet ardor, Hatoum's exudes a sardonic dread, as the simplest, seemingly innocent objects and daily rituals, bear ulterior lures of possession.

Across from the works of Hatoum and Matar is a corner of *i'm yours* themed under the heading *In Material* for its close perspective on the creativity within everyday materials. The curation centers on a short video by French-Algerian artist and filmmaker Kader Attia, titled, *Oil and Sugar #2* (2007). Intertwined with Hatoum's surreal, sculptural interpretation of teacups, Attia's use of motor oil and sugar cubes adds a touch of current events and macroeconomic analysis to the historicity of these quotidian materials.

While consumed on a regular basis, the trade of sugar and oil is an immediate and ongoing part of the cultural, political and social devastations that run through Middle Eastern and North African populations and territories. There is a reflexive didacticism in Attia's piece that is more subtly referenced in the work of Hatoum, and which, in Matar's lens, takes on a more positive

spin, integrated with the heart of her Americanized acculturation. It is crucial to Matar's practice to keep juxtaposing subjects between Lebanon and America as a continuum.

The alchemy of creating these artworks, for all three of these artists, is, ultimately, a point of departure from which to consider how innovative thinkers and cultural producers in the Middle East and North Africa continue to respond to the domestic and international pressures that have confined their families. As a result, their resilience and response, through creative work, is a tonic that, fused within America's special predicaments, is as cathartic and ameliorative as it is provocative and inspiring.

May 11, 8:15 PM  
Boston, USA

## Double

The approach to image-making whereby a figurative artist attempts to represent and convey lived experience entertains that long brush with natural realism where history and art blend and merge. Though, tempered by the exactitudes of modern photography, yet shying from the allures of technological hyperreality, the photographer Cemre Yeşil has reached for the sensitive zone where artists depart from their fellow historians, exploring the intimacies of the personal with the subject of children and their mothers.

The office-like multi-floor space of the exhibition *Double Portrait*, couched in a particularly corporate, commercial side of town in Istanbul, begins with an abrupt punch of physical realism where the image of a newborn, silent as exhibited, screams on the other end of the pieces' production. With its umbilical cord uncut, soggy and dripping, the baby holds out its hands, keeping its eyes firmly shut. Only moments before, the child had been in the womb, and, as posed over the navy blue sheet of a photography studio, is in shock, awaiting its mother's embrace.

Over photographs that detail that splashing of waves as they rock a wooden pier on a cloudy day, there is a text. The oceanic liquid is metaphorical, as the lifeblood of the earth from which life has sprung. The ocean is womb-like, and every time its waves break on land, someone is born anew, and another expires. The latter is inspiration for the poetical lines that grace the wall to open *Double Portrait*, a meditation on death, and its renewal in memory.

The flexed toes of an infant, almost like a paw, on the plush surface of a white sofa. Its bare leg suggests a baby on the move, exploring its motor skills, animalistic, realizing its strength and independence as an individual. As the exhibition winds downstairs, a series of images show a child, now standing, grasping at a jellyfish. Yeşil has a bold talent for texture and action in her photographs, which, lean into the fragmentation of perspective.

*Double Portrait* begins with the fullness of an individual body, displayed and exposed from head to foot, and more, with its fleshly connection to its mother uncut and raw. It then embarks on a course of aspects, showing, little by little, the total portrait of a child as they mature, play and live. In the stairwell at Milli Reasürans Art Gallery there is a series of photos which have an especially familiar air, as they present the teething stages of a child, who, with their mouth gaping, lips parted, parades the exuberance of early, bodily growth.

The trappings of childhood are a world unto their own. It might be true to say that generations differ more widely than cultures, even if separated by the breadth and diversity of the world's geographic and linguistic makeup. That is nowhere clearer than in the magic and terror that children experience unbeknownst to the grownups around them. Theirs is a universe in which every amusement has psychological potency, conjuring myth and vision.

*Double Portrait* exhibits its evocative stills throughout the dynamic, spacious interior of Milli Reasürans Art Gallery accompanied with a tasteful, if at times over-vibrant, selection of objects that illustrate and emphasize the themes pictured with an added dimension. A slide set over geometric flooring has a candy aesthetic, not unlike Fil Books, a cafe and bakery that Yeşil founded in 2017 as a publishing house specializing in photo books.

The gem-like, sky blue playground is comprised of a single fixture under a projector that screens a slideshow of images that breathe with recurrent color schemes, pinks and reds, greens and yellows. The photographic subjects projected are suggestive of children but do not show their bodies. Instead, model cars and colored balloons are juxtaposed with a stroller and street sign, instances of perception in which a child sees how their world is shaped for them.

Yeşil has a knack for relaying the playful fun of being a child and of being with children. In one shot, a motherly sort wearing a yellow shirt is half-covered in a rug on a laundry line that she is twirling overhead in midair. Its curation matches the hue of the surrounding wall paint. The child depicted is in a state of frazzled bliss, reliving the act of appearance, a light reminiscence of birth, the archetypal hide-and-seek.

The exhibition hall with the projector and slide is furnished with photographs that mark turning points in the maturation of youth, foods, swims, games and stretching. Yeşil has an eye for how a child sees, as a slightly unfocused palm holds out a broken tooth, freshly baked bread steams, a cone of ice cream melts on the sidewalk. *Double Portrait* is a feast of images that show feelings. Seeing them, the seer feels what they picture, subjectively, such as the creature comforts of curling up in pajamas, feeling safe in bed, or rolling around in the sand.

The works and their curation at *Double Portrait* chronicle the fantasies of consciousness, self-awareness, the joy that proceeds from relishing in the experience of mere being, arguably a function of temporality, which, during childhood, is natural, effortless. Those precious moments, which Yeşil photographed over a nine-year period of research and observation, seem to hang outside of memory.

Together with scenes of a bonfire at night, birds in flight, an unborn face, *Double Portrait* begins to unravel its running motif of that mammalian longing to be held close to, for a brief and perhaps incomplete instance, reenter the holism and interdependence of life in the womb. An older woman hugs herself while immersed in water beside an over-lit close-up of an adult hand gently grasping a baby's torso in their palm.

Yeşil's delicate, womanly oeuvre in *Double Portrait* brings to mind the portrait and body photography of the early twentieth-century Italian internationalist Tina Modotti, who trained her focus on workers' hands as part of her artistic ideology. *Double Portrait* frames the labor that child-bearing women give to the world, birthing not only bodies but the harmonization and sustenance of being. The prolific exhibition spans an impressive volume of photographs that show not only the life's work of their subjects but that of the artist.

At the very farthest reach of *Double Portrait*, there is an antique cabinet in which historical photographs of babies and children correspond to an encircling series of large-format prints in which adults embrace each other, seeking that return to the body of the mother, before identity or otherness had emerged into the light of day after birth. The cabinet sources Yeşil's muse, as she circled that place where mother and child held hands or enacted scenes of profound intimacy, bound to their own private, inner world for life.

May 21, 5:25 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Shape

In the years between 1950 and 1980, the Arab world survived the world's precarious geopolitical balance as the lines that distinguished East from West were being redrawn. Suffused with heritages of unrivaled global mixture, inheriting overlapping traditions and conflicting identities, Arab artists from India to Morocco, Kuwait to Paris pursued educations in modern techniques, painting in dialogue with canonical Western developments. But while their oeuvres encompassed avant-garde creative visions from the West, even if some decades late, their adaptations of indigenous motifs relayed the complexity of making art in the Arab world.

Abstraction, like most art terms, is a catch-all convenience for what, more exactly, includes a range of diverse, perhaps coded, representations of methodology and perception, with their puzzles of meaning, emotion or expression according to each specific artwork. *Taking Shape* verbalized its titular metaphor for abstract art as another way to say that these artists told the stories of their national and ethnic identities in the process of coming together. Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, founder of Barjeel Art Foundation, who advised for *Taking Shape*, confessed that it was a stretch for him to focus on abstract art, his least favorite genre.

While it might be overcritical to state that *Taking Shape* is a heavy-handed branding of art from what, in the U.S., remains the "developing world," the sweeping curation is not immune to generalization. In an explanatory video accompanying the show's prolific catalog of works, texts and interviews, Qassemi reveals that he would have preferred art with a more salient focus on themes pertinent to the social sciences, for example. And yet throughout, *Taking Shape* instills its audience of walking eyes with a profoundly subjective knowledge of the Arab world, direct from the lives of its minorities, women and exiles.

While the identity, "Arab," is at the forefront of the show with respect to the mainstream and official languages of the nations represented, its inclusion of artists who identify or whose descendants are Amazigh (Berber), Armenian, Circassian, Jewish, Persian, Turkish, demonstrates the inherent complication of using a single category to understand, and even more problematically, to define where a person and their relations to others begins and ends. The impetus to create beyond knowable forms of social representation, towards a visibility of pure individualism is arguably a primary motive in the pursuit of abstraction.

And true to the polymathic varieties of West Asian and North African intellectualism, many of the artists exhibited were authors of criticism, manifestos and literature that detailed the extent of their explorations and insights into the utterly shared power of individual thought and free expression, especially when held against the hard light of nationalist politics and the conditioning of its often monolithic and xenophobic cultural education. The many works by Palestinian artists at *Taking Shape* are a testament to the resilience of life in search of grace.

The two floors of galleries that comprise *Taking Shape* on the bucolic, inner-city campus of Boston College at the McMullen Museum of Art begin at the westernmost edge of the Arab

world, in Morocco. In Arabic, the word for North Africa is “maghreb”, which literally means west, but also etymologically denotes that which is strange, foreign or other. In Turkish, it is pronounced, “garip,” and can signify the exotic. Moroccan art blossomed into modernism through the Casablanca School of the 1960s. Artworks by co-founders Mohamed Melehi and Malika Agueznay are complementary in their vivifications of op-art color, framing and pattern.

Agueznay found inspiration in the corresponding structures of calligraphy and algae as she stylized her distinctively abstract, religious naturalism to the sociocultural ambiance of a newly independent Morocco, as one observer among her people, appreciating the precious and irreplaceable integrity of the local ecology with a collective sense of magic and the sacred. Calligraphy, or letterism, a direct translation of the “Hurufiyya” movement, is a common thread that connects artists of the Arab world, most of whom are raised, or come to themselves within the logocentric backgrounds of Islam.

*Taking Shape* recognizes the multi-faith web of its pale, in which Jewish, Bahai, Druze and other faiths struggle, shoulder-to-shoulder with their Muslim compatriots for those slivers of light that might afford them a glimpse of their muse. In which case, the exhibition’s generous attention to women complements the idea that artists are like the canaries that go first and headlong into the mine of the future, prophetic in their leadership. Such was the case for calligraphic painter Madiha Umar, who, born in Aleppo, became the first Iraqi woman to receive a government scholarship to study in Europe.

“Hurufiyya” artists of the letterism movement came to bolster a midcentury chorus within the Arab, Persian and Pakistani milieus. Umar’s essay, “Arabic Calligraphy: An Inspiring Element in Abstract Art” was published in 1949, the year of her first U.S. solo show at the Georgetown Neighborhood Library. Her piece at *Taking Shape* is an untitled watercolor on paper from 1978 in which lunar and planetary calligraphic markings are seemingly inhabitable, their proportions extraterrestrial, transcendent. Brushing closer with tradition, the calligraphic renderings of Palestinian artist Kamel Boullata are curated just steps from Umar's work.

Boullata, who enjoys, however posthumously, the display of a series of related pieces at the McMullen is known outside of his visual art as a renowned scholar and the author of “Palestinian Art, 1850-present” (2009). In 1983, he was producing silkscreen prints in the manner of letterism, forming novel variations on religious proclamations essential to Islam and its time-honored legacy of calligraphy. The geometric interplay of coloration and sequences of linguistic linearity that Boullata exacts sharply counterpose the parallel history of pop art in the West as mimetic and prescribed to an in-group of culture-specific consumers and agents.

The deceptive simplicity of Arabic, as Umar has written, is ideal for the cause of abstracting on visual formality, its rudimentary alphabet of lines and dots borrowed from the ancient Phoenician and Nabatean civilizations of the Levant and Arabian peninsula. Yet, artists born with Arabic on their tongues or in their ears have apparently turned to the infinite diversification of its letters to grapple with the ethnocentric nationalism of its modern societies.

Far more than a show about calligraphic art visualizing the Arabic language afresh, *Taking Shape* is sensitive of its artists' pools of genesis, from Frank Stella and Josef Albers to Japanese and Chinese art history. The didactics of exotic appeal for *Taking Shape* is symptomatic of the neglect that curators in America have sought to ameliorate by rewriting of Western art history as a symbiosis with those previously unseen. This is evident in the show's curation of *The Last Sound* (1964), an oil painting by Sudanese modernist Ibrahim El-Salahi, who, in 2013, became the first African artist to earn a solo retrospective at Tate Modern.

May 28, 4:17 PM  
Boston, USA



## Verbalism

Turkish is a panoply of languages. Nowhere is this clearer than in its history of words. And although speech and writing are made up of more than the sum of their parts, thus exceptions to grammatical rule abound in all idioms, approaching language from the perspective of conceptualism in art history gleans a provident harvest of creative impetus, which, as artist Deniz Gül has shown, demands participatory engagement. Her installations are often generous public gestures, prompting those who might appreciate her works to think, write and listen, as she has done, to the constant surface-scratching that serves to uphold or remake civilization.

The idea that any human tongue might be circumscribed to the myth of a single folklore of exclusive ethnic entanglement is clearly and immediately disprovable by any studied glance over a piece of writing, or even a simple, educated overhearing of passing conversation. Turkish, in its current spoken and written forms, is the result of language reform and multicultural tensions. It is the living extension of its speakers as they continue to engage in uninterrupted, albeit artificially altered, discourse since time immemorial. Most importantly, it is as alive as its human community.

But unlike individuals whose lives are bound to the condition of sole embodiment, languages have an independent life of their own. They may die or become extinct while their people live, silent as the voices of their ancestors. A person, just like any one language, is a potent vessel of many overlapping tongues. As the history of national modernism has shown, death and extinction are inappropriate metaphors where Hebrew, for example, is the only language to have been resurrected from its dormant state as a dead, liturgical language. It is nowadays spoken afresh by young people who, with a basic education, read ancient texts like new.

In her piece, *Klavus ("Plungr")* (2016-2021), Gül culminated five years of research and writing in reference to the standard Turkish spelling guide that ostensibly educates as it mystifies children across schools in Turkey. In the well-stocked library at Salt Galata, furnished with a broad selection of critical periodicals and academic literature, *Scratch and Surface* fans out with a series of spotlit tables on which the pages of the spelling guide are open and presented as scrawled with the red marker of the artist as she mused on her subject. Mostly impromptu, her adaptations and interpretations reflect her conceptual poetics.

With the parallel of a photographic memory, but for words (what might be termed a logographic memory), Gül, when asked, is able to recall every detail of each cryptic scratch that she impressed onto the surface of her copy of the dry reference book, which she practically water-logged with traces of personal invention. In brief, she retrained the usage of Turkish into a course of individual exploration, expressing her voice as an artist who sees language itself as fiction, going one step further than its demarcation as symbolic. In the process, she came across words that have been lost to popular knowledge, vestigial perhaps, but no less riveting.

For the word “tohum,” which means “seed,” she underlined and starred it, noting a variety of reflexive patterns, her own image-making of signs and effects that, without a thorough, immersive explanation, are as mysterious as the older, unused words in their midst. Beside “tohum” Gül wrote “evde,” meaning “at home”. The associations, free and interpretive, are aptly accompanied in the context of the show's many moving parts. *Klavus* is arguably best paired with *Çeviri* (“*Translation*”) and the website artwork hashwords.net, comprised of a selection of words hyperlinked to their latest appearance on the Internet.

Consider that words are a kind of prehistoric, sonic evidence manifest as the foremost currency of human communication. In that context, following leads from their collective source in text to the mind of an artist invites ample comparability to the Internet’s algorithmic capacity to excavate the broader contexts of language in relation to the sociocultural moment and the technological channels through which linguistic forms are transferred. These themes are further explored in the lecture series that Gül produced as part of *Scratch and Surface* within the frame of *Çeviri* (accessible at [ceviri.info](http://ceviri.info)).

Underground at Salt Galata, in proximity to the building's former Ottoman bank vaults, a construction worker is busy covering the floor of a vast, windowless basement room with puzzling trails of concrete blocks, purposefully removing and redirecting them according to an architectural map produced by the artist. The streaks of solidifying adhesion have a peculiarly editorial air, and the blueprint is an apt, visual parallel to *Klavus*. As a metaphor for the writing process, Gül's installation *Daire Düz* (“*Flat*”) (2021) is representative of the artist's signature logocentric sense of humor in which concepts reach life-size proportions.

In conversation, while she advised her solitary construction staff, apparently handpicked from a commercial construction site, Gül reminisced on her days visiting the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while participating in the Sharjah Biennial in 2017. It was in that rapidly developing city where she observed buildings under construction and, as a conceptual sculptor who writes as part of her artistic practice, saw the everyday activity from a creative standpoint. The inception of *Daire Düz* resulted from Gül’s constant fount of commingling inspirations that ensue like living language, transcending normative grammatical law to be understood.

To round out the installations of *Scratch and Surface*, literary, archival, performative, interventionist and multimedia, there is a room up the elegant stairs from the entranceway foyer at Salt Galata in which Gül placed three books, with three words inked on each page beside an iPad open to a sample of voice recordings. The piece is *Tavlamalar* (“*Temperings*”) (2021), and like *Klavus*, or the hashwords.net site of *Çeviri*, it ventures into the nature of language as connective tissue, which by its concatenations of sounds, meanings and letters always leads to more, even if there is no seemingly traceable logic by which to return or repeat said phenomena. Language, like art, is finally exposed, arbitrary as it is flexible, open-ended as the future.

June 2, 3:46 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Assyrian

At the beginning of the last millennium before the Common Era, in the ninth century B.C., the idea of empire was stretching its legs. For the next 200 years, the Assyrians had claimed territories across the Middle East and Central Asia, from the Persian Gulf to the present-day Turkish southern province of Mersin, encompassing a wide swath of eastern Anatolia and snaking down throughout the Levant and most of the Nile that spans Egypt.

Yet, despite its then-unrivaled military and administrative prowess overseeing such vast and diverse regions and peoples, the material culture of its palace artisans remains as the gleaming legacy of its brawny civilization whose visual motifs appear to be more Babylonian than Hittite. In its former imperial pale, millions of Syriac speakers are descendants of the Assyrians, characterized, in retrospect, by the decadence of its spoils transmuted into art.

Sculpted with the promise of earthly immortality, Assyrian palaces were vessels of aesthetic splendor glorifying the hyper-masculine strength of its conquests. The exhibition *Assyria: Palace Art of Ancient Iraq* at Getty Villa attests to the power of physical might celebrated through a steady flux of conflicts and festivities that preceded the classical notion of tragedy and comedy in mimetic works of earthly representation.

Mostly on loan from the British Museum in London, the special curation of ancient Assyrian sculpture is temporarily on display within the lavish complex of the Italianate mansion overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The works span the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C. and are fronted by a series of nineteenth-century expedition drawings by English archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, gleaned from the Getty Research Institute.

Layard knew how to decipher cuneiform and employed his skills as a draughtsman and art historian when observing the monuments of Nineveh firsthand in 1849 and 1853. As the author of *Nineveh and Its Remains*, Layard was a name of note among the eastward travelers of late colonial British society. It is not by coincidence that he simultaneously assumed the roles of politician and diplomat following his keen, exacting illustrations of elaborate reliefs.

The drawing *Siege of a City on the Bank of a River*, which Layard made on the spot during his second expedition to Assyria, has no comparably sized parallel among the reliefs held under the museum light for moderns to see in California today. It shows two broad, horizontal tracts of riparian terrain, as a royal procession on one side of a river is juxtaposed with battle scenes on the other.

The British Museum's loans are, essentially, the shared multinational treasures of Assyrian people in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey and elsewhere. In reference to Layard and the colonial context of archaeological and museological history, the tangible heritage of the anonymous Assyrian artists whose work is curated at the Getty Villa speaks to the problematic nature of universalizing the appreciation of cultural artifacts.

The repercussions of modernism are still felt and endured by those who have inherited non-Western identities, including people who speak endangered languages and whose traditions, whether secular or religious, preserve older ties to land and community than that prescribed by current national prerogatives. Despite vast differences in time and geography, the importance of ancient Assyrian art is not merely to appease an anachronistic curiosity.

And it is just the collapsibility of temporal and regional exoticism to the immediacy of the moment, perceived through a prism of visual symmetry, that keeps the contemporaneity of Assyrian art fresh. As exhibited at the Getty Villa, the reliefs have been restored and conserved with profound attention to detail. Their contours are as vibrant as they are lucid, communicating the social codes of their day when bulls, lions, eunuchs and musicians competed for royal favor.

One such gypsum relief, titled, *Royal Lion Hunt* is dated 645-640 B.C., during the reign of King Ashurbanipal. Excavated from a dig in the North Palace in Nineveh, the mane of the lion it depicts is clearly engraved and bears an optically rich geometry as sharp as the beast's claws as it emerges from a cage, jaw down, with a penetrating, carnivorous glare. The stone, split in two and standing together, shows three illustrative scenes carved lengthwise.

Each scenario is a demonstration of the lion subdued. The killing, enslavement and exhibition of the caught lion can be thought of as similar to the possession and glorification of Eastern civilizations as they exist in the palm of Western methods of art and science, which, beautify, and thereby seek to cleanse the guilt of an underlying postcolonial, geopolitical strain. Assyrian palaces shot, chained and displayed lions as a proud source of authority.

Interestingly, the Orientalist painting that was in vogue when Layard was documenting his archaeology on the Assyrian palace often used the image of a lion as a metaphor for the despotic rulers who were imagined to slam their iron fists over the wild, far-flung territories whose ancient ruins and the myths that encircle them continue to impact lives of people in the lands where eastern Turkey borders Syria, Iraq and Iran.

For sovereigns overseeing a major empire, that which is unexamined is not worth conquering. In other words, palaces in Iraq spoke to that aspect of elite Assyrian culture which was concerned with how its rulers were perceived. *The Humiliation of the Elamite Kings*, also uncovered at the North Palace of Nineveh, showed how during the reign of Ashurbanipal in 645-650 B.C., even Assyrians, who to museum-goers in California would symbolize the primeval origins of civilization in the East, had their own directional complex.

Assyrians in ancient days very well could have considered themselves to be “Western,” or central, against the fringe realms they vanquished. *The Humiliation of the Elamite Kings* is a testament to their cruelty, as they not only forced their captives from the eastern neighboring kingdom of Elam to become their servants but engraved that conversion and their domination onto the stone of their kings’ highest plane of worldly habitation.

Such reliefs as *The Humiliation of the Elamite Kings* are provident for students of premodern forms of anthropology, as the distinctions of the peoples of Assyria and those from Elam are discernible by the features of their respective clothes and bodies. After thoughtfully reading the curatorial analyses, the diverse characteristics of the sculpted figures come alive, patterned with a visual literacy as legible to any Assyriologist as the cuneiform alongside them.

June 9, 5:30 PM  
Los Angeles, USA

## Juncture

Cultural work, when produced, is generally a response to the political moment. Artists, as it were, are said to reflect the times. But once their work is done, the institutions of cultural preservation that house the legacy, or better, the inheritance of Western civilization, nation by nation, are tasked with just how to frame a sense of relevance, contextualizing the potency of the past's relentless influence, or even undead presence.

The persistence of Orientalist art, as held up to the museum spotlight around the world, then, is only as important in retrospect as it is in today's world in which North Africa and the Middle East remain subject to global powers. While forms of military and economic control have changed, the apparatuses of colonialism are in force and have arguably strengthened under the guise of status quo, nation-state imperialism.

The means of conviction that would justify the subduing of others in the name of good and reason are sprawled across those historical paintings included within the genre of "Orientalism," a term that came into popular usage following the 1978 publication of the landmark book under that very name by Palestinian American scholar Edward Said. In the wake of Said's thought, no production of culture is immune to postcolonial criticism.

Between the possessions of physical beauty and its intimacy with masculine violence, painters like Eugene Delacroix, and later Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Henri Matisse explored the aesthetics of racism and sexism, brushing with that sensitive zone where collective and personal dominations blur. When rolled out across a canvas, lathered expertly with colored oils to represent scenes of war, love and adventure the effect is, finally, brutally hypocritical.

In the context of America's shared heritage with that of Europe, the National Gallery of Art in D.C. forms a bold, direct line of cultural continuity and its ensuing appropriations since colonial times. The relay of French colonialism in the nineteenth century has certain parallels to that of current American occupations in North Africa and the Middle East which are visible in the paintings exhibited in the "Orientalism" room.

In purely technical terms, considering the creative use of paint beyond the politicized context of such works, Orientalist painters were forming a bridge between natural realism and impressionism. In many cases, painters worked on canvases after hearing travelers gossip, viewing sketches from the road, going off the works of colleagues who did in fact embark on journeys afar where the Italian pale abutted Ottoman territories in Greece.

The imagination of the other, namely a Muslim, woman, Turk or Arab, was, for many Orientalist artists, better than the real thing because the fantastical images they spawned out of thin air served to satisfy the appetites of their patrons and a social taste whose makers deemed the East an exotic trove of stereotypes. In fact, the ways in which people lived on the ground in such lands were often completely at odds with the fancies of Europe's art world elites.

That which cuts through otherness is familiarity, a trait that, to some travelers from the West, still comes as a surprise when traversing what had previously appeared to be places where locals were previously defined by objective difference. But painting, unlike travel itself, does not demand contact with others, and especially when couched in tradition, may simply refer to related works of art.

*Odalisque* (1870), an oil on canvas by Renoir, falls into the heavy tropes of the Orientalist saga in painting. Into the early twentieth century, most artists of note would exercise their craft by rendering the image of a woman, loosely dressed, reclining sensually, in a room not of her own. The word “odalisque” is a Francophone turn of pronunciation for what in Turkish is spelled, “odalık,” essentially meaning an enslaved concubine and chambermaid.

Like a still life, Orientalist figures gave artists a chance to try their hands at making pictures attractive. Thus, perhaps it could be said the early seeds of capitalist advertising were planted. It is likely no coincidence that these late modern trends in art came to define geopolitical relations after the Cold War gave way to rampant capitalism in regions formerly under Russian influence.

Yet, macroeconomics aside, the details of international relations are as evident in the exchange of a single painting on which a woman lay, her eyes half-open, dressed in lavish, gold-threaded layers of soft clothes, her dark hair spread over a pillow. Renoir painted his *Odalisque* with a somnolent gaze, her pale discolored skin almost sickly. It would seem that he was making a visual comment of the costs of outward extravagance on the body.

The curation of the "Orientalism" room at the National Gallery of Art in D.C. shows that the colonialist movement in European art history was mostly the result of works by oil painters of French and Italian extraction during the nineteenth century. But in the late twentieth century, as American interests in the Middle East became more violent, cultural critics like Said were singing a different tune.

A question might emerge for any keen museum-goer and art-lover, whether it is possible to separate the misguided inventions of the past from a more naive appreciation of their unfaded, naive beauty in the present, and what the repercussions of that oversight could be. One oil, dated 1837, *Woman of the 'Orient'* by German-born Frenchman Henri Lehmann, used a classical realist touch, foregrounding its female subject as mirror-like perfection.

Lehmann's approach made Easternness as exotic as the Grecian antiquity from which the West has drawn its wealth of foundational ideas. Although the painting is as crystal clear and sharply defined as an icon, there is not a trace of Christian symbolism. Its model is a figment of purity, as clean and innocent as the clothes in which she is draped like the curtains that round out the beautifully lit, seaside vista.

Ultimately, the realism of Lehmann's anonymous portrait is unconvincing, seeing as how the woman at its center could have been a Roman goddess or Mother Mary. The tendency toward pictorial mimesis was perhaps more successful in scenography, as when Jean-Léon Gérôme detailed his canvas, *View of Medinet El-Fayoum* (1868-1870), painting robed Egyptian men on horseback from a safe distance, reminiscent of a Eugène Delacroix, only during peacetime.

June 17, 5:56 PM  
Washington DC, USA



## Climatology

Prior to modern technology's tracking atmospheric systems, people kept records of climactic change according to measures of importance that they could not foresee. And before humans left a trace, nature was leaving a trail of signs. In their research-heavy exhibition, encompassing five expansive multimedia installations, London-based duo Cooking Sections mounted their piece, *Weathered* (2021), in the entryway of Salt Beyoğlu to demonstrate climatological literacy across the epochs.

*Weathered* is comprised of fossilized tree specimens, with some dating back over forty million years. The vast scope held within their approach is divided into seven topographies based on those discerned by the First Geography Congress in Ankara, organized under the auspices of the Ministry of National Education in 1941. In terms of climate, soil and yield, Turkey, they surmised, is an agglomeration of the Marmara, Aegean, Black Sea, Mediterranean, Central Anatolian, Eastern Anatolian and Southeastern Anatolian regions.

Vertically latched onto the characterful stone columns that uphold the foyer atrium at Salt Beyoğlu is a prehistoric sequoia, its threaded bark texture still intact. Hailing from an overlap of geological eras twenty-eight to twenty-three million years old, when the Upper Oligocene became the Early Miocene, its discovery speaks of a time when the planet was cooling, as coal deposits began to form in Thrace, eventually serving today's extractive industries that contribute to unprecedented global warming.

Cooking Sections exhibited the sizable piece of ancient sequoia with the knowledge that its presence indicates a mild, swampy wetland environment, which, until recently was found to stretch farther than previously understood, spanning Turkey's European landmass to Central Anatolia through the Pliocene epoch, going back five million years. Besides fragments of sequoia wood, most of the fossils presented for *Weathered* are leafy impressions on stone, including palms that prove how the western forests abutting the Black Sea were once tropical.

Just as intriguing are the textual sources that accompany *Weathered*, gleaned from an Ottoman newspaper, *La Turquie*, which ran from 1874 to 1895. Drawn from the archives of Salt Research and translated into English, excerpts detail the ways in which local populations around Turkey's far eastern city of Erzurum and southern city of Adana endured extreme cold. The winter of 1874 was especially cruel. While people and animals died, the rich began to hoard and agriculture became newsworthy.

In their text prefacing *Weathered*, Cooking Sections elaborates on early climatology as the “constructed aggregate” of both arboreal fossils, with respect to their informing conditions in the present, and unscientific reportage that when organized appropriately evidences the drifting of seasonal patterns. Observable drift is at the crux of the institution-wide exhibition titled *CLIMAVORE*, referring to a newfound awareness of diet as directly and immediately tied with the fate of the planet's climate.

*Weathered* provides historical background and environmental context at *CLIMAVORE*, chronicling Turkey's meteorological technology, which began officially with the opening of its first modern station in Ankara in 1927 and was preceded by imperial efforts in Istanbul with French and German support. The turn from scattered, informal anecdotes for public broadcast to regular scientific monitoring shared among peers in the field between Europe and Anatolia has a corollary in the work that Cooking Sections is exporting to Istanbul's cultural sector.

Coincidentally, the means of more accurate climatological observation have emerged simultaneously with industrial degrees of consumption, not only of food agriculture but of the broader ecology. Such is the reasoning behind the display of freshly hewn hornbeam and pine to conclude *Weathered* with a cautionary note as fast-wood plantations are harvested to abandon, exacerbating the malign effects of climate change. The installation that follows, titled *The Lasting Pond* (2021), is an apt representation of mass consumerism.

Furnished with one thousand ceramic dairy pots traditionally used as a vessel for *sütlaç*, a milky sweet pudding, and a single photograph, *The Lasting Pot* is a prolific assessment of the water buffalo's migration from Bulgaria, across the Thracian plain into northwestern Turkey. Mining and urbanization have created a triad of interdependent alterations to the region's land, animals and people. Since the 1990s, water buffalo have adapted to the shuttering of mines, bathing in its flooded pits, but ongoing construction projects pose fresh challenges.

As with their tree fossils, Cooking Sections got their hands dirty for *The Lasting Pond*, conversing with local buffalo herders, extracting clay from migration routes to make their ceramic pots on display in collaboration with potter and archaeologist Başak Gökalsın, as well as the surviving buffalo milk shops in Istanbul. And they went further, advising the renowned Culinary Arts Academy (in Turkish, *Mutfak Sanatları Akademisi*) to add buffalo milk as an integral ingredient in their pastry curricula.

If that was not enough, Cooking Sections revitalized a project by artist Serkan Taycan, entitled *Between Two Seas* (2014), mapping the buffalo wallows, and prompting keen audience members at Salt Beyoğlu to go and see the drift for themselves. Water buffalo are juxtaposed with farmed fish in the adjacent installation, *Traces of Escapes* (2021), an eerie video series of circular breeding pools projected from ceiling to floor, complemented by an Anglophone voice discussing the philosophy behind the science of genetic engineering.

*Traces of Escapes* is well paired with another installation at *CLIMAVORE*, titled *Unicum* (2021), as both address changes in Turkey's surrounding waters. The Black Sea is said to increasingly assume a warmer, more Mediterranean genealogical makeup as a result of climate shifts and the introduction of foreign species of fish and algae brought in during the shipping booms of the last decades. *Unicum* also features a voiceover, only in the whistling, bird language native to the Black Sea, as its speakers bemoan the loss of staple seafood.

An impressive, digitally cataloged archive of farming history in Turkey rounds out the extensive multi-installation exhibition of *CLIMAVORE* with a piece called *Exhausted* (2021). And it is an utterly exhausting assemblage of objects and ephemera, encompassing everything from neolithic female figurines dated to as old as the eighth millennium B.C., Ottoman decrees garlanded with floral motifs to country fair paraphernalia from the early Turkish Republic. *Exhausted* is quite up to speed, showing Turkish corn seeds in 2021 as susceptible to the spread of GMOs illegal in Turkey.

Cooking Sections then explored further with e-flux architecture to foment a number of critical essays. Among them, Onur Inal, a postdoctoral researcher in Near Eastern Studies at the University of Vienna and founder of the Network for the Environmental History of Turkey, wrote about the importance of soil within an anthropogenic frame. His piece, *Nourishing the Soil, Feeding the Nation* went succinctly and carefully through medieval to contemporary periods in Turkish farming, culminating in a demand for organics among small-scale growers. While it may seem to be an obvious conclusion, the history of its progression is rife with stunted growths and dangerous additives. And the fertilization of Turkish soil remains controversial.

June 22, 5:46 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Traces

An accordion buzzes, hums and drones, played, as it were, by a model ship situated on a city street. The amalgamating amusement of movement jiggers back and forth at a regular rhythm, and the multidisciplinary instrument is tied to a fixed pole. As the pulsing sound patterns on to effect, the dichotomy between diversion and utility is pronounced, wordlessly, by Nevin Aladağ's strict, cool videography.

Edited with an exacting sense of aural engineering, the ambiance that *Traces* creates is that of an avant-garde composition attuned to an art history in which music and objects intertwine toward a broader context of the meaning and the experience of listening. But Aladağ goes further than the crew of the artistic movement Fluxus who, under the genius of such figures as Nam June Paik and John Cage, entertained an open ending to the multimedia of twentieth-century modernism.

In that way, *Traces* complements the concurrent Arter exhibition, *For Eyes That Listen*, curated by the particularly exciting sonic intellect of Melih Fereli. The show has the potential to prompt a surge in the appreciation of the art world's overlap where Turkish and German backgrounds have merged while seated at the table of what Cage famously referred to as chance occurrence, sometimes more fancily termed as that of the aleatory.

In contrast to the fixed modes of composition, the life of environmental sound, even if artificial, holds the essence of probability. It is its condition of opposition — from stillness to motion, predetermination to performance — that produces the result of what's played. The prime variable could be said to be time. *Traces*, however, might argue for the importance of place as the ground from which new music arises.

Extreme site-specificity has been a hallmark of Fluxus-inspired works, epitomized, perhaps, by Cage's iconoclastic composition *4'33*. Aladağ, in turn, has configured various settings out of her childhood memories growing up in Stuttgart for *Traces*, transforming the nostalgic scenes of parks, rooftops and avenues into depersonalized musicians, the environment as a performer. She seems to wonder what kind of music the places she remembers would play.

There is an abrupt jump cut from the wheezing monotone of the accordion, punctuated by an ocean drum hovering over a road and followed by the shrill pierce of a balloon deflating into a flute. The transition is marked by the crashing ring of a gong before a frame drum steps down a flight of stairs, its percussive function revised by gravity's pull. The gong and drum roll across paved and grassy terrains. Their circular, wooden surfaces sustain a textural resonance.

Aladağ compressed a series of sharp sonic tastes that in succession serve a consistent, nourishing appetite for music that sounds like a fusion of the urbane and the natural. All things, whether in the upper atmosphere or a sewer, are motive. The spin of a stray drum softly rumbling down a street has a liquid aura, the throb of accordion and tambourine attached to mechanical, kinetic children's rides are arboreal, earthy.

At a point, *Traces* merges its otherwise unique separation of videos, while the sounds flow in compositional unity, where a violin is strapped to the outer rung of a merry-go-round as its strings graze a bow affixed to the ground, culminating in a gradual screeching halt. The camera is held in different positions, to the instrument, the ride and bow, provoking a kind of musical anticipation, both tempered by its aural and physical circumstances.

The presence of silence is prescient throughout, animated by intervals of airy legato when the accordion is loosed, its top hanging from a metal unit, or as the flute-bound balloon hovers upward and the wind plays a moving panpipe. The silvery beads inside the ocean drum come into a focused closeup, resonating like tires zooming over an empty street. Although these reverberations might be mere noise to some, Aladağ has edited them with meditative clarity.

There is minimalism at work behind what appears to be quite complex contrivances of music, video and installation. Somehow, together, there is ample space in which to breathe and take in the artist's remembered spaces with delicately timed, playfully rich interventions. It does seem that Aladağ is versed in music theory, considering the harmonious sequence that ensues as, for example, when the low tone of the accordion mixes with the high-pitched balloon flute.

In musical terms, *Traces* has inflections that could be found in the spacious, instrumental vocabulary of Morton Feldman, or the layered, futuristic percussion assemblages of Steve Reich. The use of repetition is key, then, where Aladağ has mixed and matched the self-performing instrumentation that she concocted like a prepared piano, to rise, crescendoing from the recollections of her early life.

For Aladağ, Stuttgart is a blank canvas on which to drip, lather and spatter abstractions of music. Another reference could be that of Harry Partch, a radical theorist and inventor of instruments, which he applied to his otherworldly composition style, only Aladağ has refashioned Stuttgart itself into a musical apparatus. Like a collagist, the violin, triangle, drums, gong, tambourine and bells that she employed are intimately woven within the urban fabric.

While mostly unpeopled, the accordion is, at times, surrounded by out-of-focus pedestrians, which makes for a mood of youthful abandon. *Traces* evokes that secret life that children experience in direct communication with magic in all of its forms. Because the inside of an ocean drum sounds like falling rain, or a fast-moving river, it then becomes that, transformed into such natural phenomena instilled by the imagination.

*Traces* comes across as a sincere, modest gesture of interconnection between the artist and her hometown, projecting its every delight and curiosity with a musical relish. In Istanbul, the relative simplicity of its soundscape is cathartic, open with outstretched expanses that allow a runaway frame drum to spin headlong over an empty park, or across a sparsely walked street, before turning over and collapsing like a whirligig.

The elements of chance that shape *Traces* are mechanical and gravitational, the former providing rhythm, the latter a kind of music based on field recordings not unlike the production of photographs of artificial settings. Aladağ arranged the sound with a fresh sensibility for the beauty of randomness that cities offer to those who might listen to them like a hiker would a forest or lake. Within every movement, the environment sings to its own beat.

July 8, 12:55 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Polychromatic

The act of curation has the potential to inspire bold moves toward collectivity in a variety of its forms – social, creative and economic, all the more so in the name of fundamental aspects of the human condition in concert with people otherwise separated by nationality, physiology or any number of perceived differences. While in Istanbul, curator Tima Jam dedicated her work to seeing contemporary art from Iran and Turkey under the same umbrella of visions, their dialectics coalescing. Now in London, she is widening her perspicacious grasp to include a broader representation of the internationalist art world.

The artists whose works come together for *Polychromatic* are from Turkey, Iran, Nigeria and Mexico, and their pieces are as diverse as their respective nationalities. The show is currently online via a virtual walkthrough under the auspices of Daniel Raphael Gallery in London, which, by collaborating with Tima Jam, has elaborated its voice as a unique curatorial platform on which to perform acts of solidarity. A case might be made for transcending national modes entirely in the context of new art, though, especially in the prevailing, tested milieu of the U.K. today, such reflexive geopolitical awareness remains pressing.

In the statement of its curation, *Polychromatic* puts forward a number of concepts concerning matters of identity, a crucial point of administrative interest for agents and rulers of any modern nation-state in which the lives of individuals are held at a distance from persons not entirely subject to its obligations and rights of the citizenry, namely foreigners. In response, artists are, as ever, at the forefront of change, as models and leaders, at times antiheroic, in a progressive forum inside the national construct, but not of it. That *Polychromatic* features artists from outside the U.K. is a testament to its alignment with universalist values.

The prospective world heritage that creatives are manufacturing toward a more inclusive future is linked to prehistory, and while running through the bureaucratic nightmares and bountiful spoils of modernism, preserves a link to sources of shared insight into the manifold nature of humanness. The element of color is both a point of pride and shame in societies that have historically benefited from artificial, unscientific and imposed hierarchal orders based on spectral ranges of integumentary pigment. By focusing on artists from Asia, Africa and Latin America, Jam is raising her curatorial practice with discursive urgency.

Instead of looking away to transcend the biases at work in any social construct built around the notion of individualism, art fills the eye to the brim with the light of awareness. Between the palpable and the visible, colors are effectively bridges, or doors, opening the mind to be able to see patterns of involuntary cognition, and, in turn, to check them. The gift of art is that these educative phenomena unfold like an ameliorating tonic, sometimes bitter, within a round of aesthetic pleasure and conceptual curiosity. In lieu of visibility, color is the equivalent of metaphor, as it is applied in literature.

Jam has explicitly referenced Surrealism and psychoanalysis to frame the ways in which the works of the artists on display might be seen, even if unconsciously, with a keen eye for their usages of color. Emotions, for example, are expressed not only on the surface, in facial gestures, but are deeply woven throughout personal psychology. The paintings of Turkish artist Mustafa Horasan are dark with bruised flesh tones of black, purple and red. His bodily shapes are rasped and semi-transparent, recalling a fantasy world out of the alchemical imagination of Carl Jung and his least inhibited patients.

There are essentially two series of canvases by Horasan, dichotomized by their underlying washes of hue. Horasan is not technically virtuosic but instills more of a naivety in those who would appreciate the breadth of his strokes, the primal burst of images, disproportional hands and childlike skulls that he projects like the notion of elementary ideas professed by the German ethnographer Adolf Bastian. Like the Mexican artist Horacio Quiroz, Horasan's pieces are alternate to the mainstream capitalism of the art world. His is an anti-aesthetic that simultaneously employs a nuanced, layered sensibility for both light and movement.

Quiroz and Horasan also relate in their integration of words, while forwarding particularly garish, bombastic styles. All of Horasan's paintings at *Polychromatic* are untitled. One piece, painted in 2020, shows a wolfish face, in profile, exhaling a cloud that blows over the onomatopoeia "boom," as the silhouette of a human figure steps onto a black circle oval, "whole," spelled with two o's. The surreality of his paintings are multidimensional, somehow more otherworldly and opaque, certainly darker on the spectrum than that of Quiroz, whose techniques are sharper, yet no less subject to realism.

Quiroz's oil painting, *Why should our bodies end at the skin* (2020), foregrounds language as a portal through which the gaze of humanistic plurality burns. Its bright, yellow color scheme is shared by the accompanying piece, *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (2020). Both paintings stretch portraiture to the reaches of multiplicity, as it joins two feminine faces, lively and meditative. The short-cropped hair on their hoodie-wrapped head is a trendy, bleached white, streaked with blues. Quiroz seems to critique the viral contiguity of the prevailing economic order as youth, grasped from behind by two, nail-polished hands.

The oil work of Milad Mousavi is perhaps outwardly similar to that of Quiroz and especially Horasan. The young, Tehran-born artist paints corresponding themes. *The Artist Has Died* (2021) is one such piece, with a hint of self-portraiture, as Mousavi's unmistakably mustachioed visage is seen throughout his oeuvre at *Polychromatic*. His thick lathering bears an uncanny likeness to Salman Khoshroo, also born in Iran in the 1980s, yet steeped in the New York schools of his upbringing. Khoshroo's compact oils on the wood are sculptures of paint, faces leaping out of two-dimensionality with fresh juxtapositions of color.

A most welcome curatorial innovation enlivening the scope of *Polychromatic* is the inclusion of seven paintings by Nigerian artist Olamide Ogunade Olisco. As in the works of Quiroz, Olisco's figures stare back at the art-loving seer, only with piercing, almost vengeful looks of intensity



and scrutiny, untrusting and thoughtful. Olisco is masterful in matte black, emphasizing the beauty and power of African people against saturations of loud colors. One acrylic and charcoal on canvas, *Secret Admirer* (2021) centers on a woman holding a kitten. Her sunglasses are neon, electric, and she, unsmiling, is equal parts aloof and captivating, still before a room glowing with bubbles. The black in the window outside, however, is darkest.

July 14, 3:41 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Bodies

The world is grappling with a complex of pressures, infolding into itself like a deluge as the hydra heads of climate change and xenophobic nationalism comport toward an unsettling fate. Meanwhile, billionaires reach for the stars on private spaceships. Back among the earthbound, the question of togetherness is paramount, as the rule of national borders shifts, entangled by the pandemic and the advancement of individualism along the course of history.

It is as crucial for contemporaries to ask who “we” are as it is to ask who “I” am. And they might be two sides of the same coin, flipped, as it were, by those few and lucky privileged enough to socially distance from the high ground of soapbox politics and its frequent torrents of imposed order. In today’s extraordinary milieu, the work of artists is reliably prescient, enabling a reshuffle of consciousness, so as to see clearer the way through imminent ruins.

As prolific a curator as Istanbul’s art world enjoys, perhaps, Kevser Güler is a recurring name on the horizon of cultural production in Turkey, mounting a proud scope of exhibitions between Arter and Yapı Kredi Arts and Culture and beyond that run the gamut of new creativity and relevant history. The show, *On Celestial Bodies*, references the astronomer Carl Sagan, who peerlessly captivated the popular imagination as integral in the greater astral ecology.

But more, Güler’s curatorial vision is an indictment of anthropocentric exceptionalism, to steal words from Arter’s statement. Another perfect turn of phrase in use in the context of the show is “radical relationality,” a profound and bemusing concoction of terms that seem to instill a reconnaissance with universal wonder. Whereas societies are damaged by artificial hierarchies, so are natural environments. The difference, the mark, is one of context, of framing.

In modestly-sized contiguity of rooms on the opening floor of Istanbul’s flagship contemporary art museum, Güler has prompted a quiet bout of unrest in the face of that ghostly enigma that appears to rear its head before the living, reminding everyone, at once, that mere mortals are circumscribed, bound, not only by each other but by what sense of a whole might exist if its parts had the faculty to grasp itself as one.

The selection of artists for *On Celestial Bodies*, gleaned from Arter’s house collections, is unique, striking. Added to the fact that none of the works’ makers or titles are listed in view of the works themselves provides a fresh, experiential glimmer of insight into the nature of objective interrelationship. It opens with a photograph. A thin, blonde figure stands alone in their apartment, dressed entirely in vibrant red. It has the effect of a winter morning.

The person in the center of the image holds up a piece of metal, cubic, reflective, and about the breadth of her palm. To her side, the refraction has projected against the wall, and, quite subtly, renders a rainbow pattern. The soft spread of light splayed throughout the interior photograph is evocative, gently patterned like a chorus of visibility. Beside it, a trio of paintings tells another story, also in red, of what Aldous Huxley called the “doors of perception.”

A canvas encompasses a nondescript amalgamation of mechanical forms, bordered by pale smudges of white, a strip of yellow, and centered by a sharp rectangle of flat red, punctuated by two textural black dots. The succession of works hones in on the rectangle, secondly showing it unframed by the object it colors until finally, it is a mere square of red paint. The primary shape is likened to a container, the triad resulting in the exposure of its contents.

The convention of four ninety-degree angles by which to hold an image still is elaborated in a profuse display that might be characterized as a gallery of film negatives, pasted against the museum's frontal glass wall, suffused by the natural light that pours in from the busy avenue immediately outside Arter's entry facade. A close look reveals a broad representation of artifacts spanning classical art history. The apparition of a Renaissance oil painting or an ancient Greek sculpture against the faded backdrop of a traffic jam in the heart of Turkey has the effect of an especially insightful point of criticism with respect to the potential of human creativity against the eyesores of industrial urbanization. The problem remains, however, of what the unnamed artist under discussion intended in their production, and considering those who both see it and through it. Among a curious assemblage of what might be aptly conceived as "art objects," including metal twisted out of all sense of practicality, ergonomic body braces suspended from the ceiling on wires, a crumpled drawing of a scepter-bearing male-like figure, and other fantasies of physicality, post-perception, there is a room dedicated to a particularly satisfying work of video. If prosaic in comparison to other pieces in the show, its focus is no less bracing.

Its three channels are projected against bare walls. It follows men living in the far reaches of Turkey's high, snow-capped mountains. They are sometimes accompanied by a friend, relative, neighbor or muscly dog fit for the rugged landscape. They trudge upward, toward the heights of the peaks where, in proximity with the sky, they can access cell service. The meat of the motion pictures is their conversations, in Kurdish, just checking in with loved ones. The snail's pace of the videography, and the demeanor of the men, along with their canine companions, exude the good-naturedness of human life as defined, absolutely, by the massive scope of rural, earthly surroundings, through which they pierce, with a tool and a voice, simply to touch base with their roots, their parents and their dreams, their children. And once having done so, they retreat back into the white mists of obscurity.

There is a series of four photographs that play on a similar theme, only with a surrealistic dash of humor. The large-print images show a typical Anatolian family, older men in business attire, women shawled for domestic casual and presentably dressed children. They stand in circles, holding onto each other's hands. But their otherwise ordinary demonstration of kindred solidarity is tempered by the inclusion of dogs and kids, baby goats, standing on their hind legs, raising their heads in unbroken continuity with the human family.

July 20, 8:19 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Nexus

There is a lane of houses on the balmy, tree-lined streets of one island among an archipelago on the Atlantic coast where high-ranking U.S. military officers once resided while staging far-flung campaigns that rocked the entire planet with the mark of stars and stripes. Colonel's Row, as it is known, on Governors Island, a terrain that is fast becoming an epicenter in New York City for new crops of cultural and ecological initiatives. Among its intellectual fare is the American part of a multi-city exhibition by Protocinema, spanning the globe from Seoul to Bangkok, Santurce to Guatemala City and back to Istanbul, where the nomadic contemporary art collective is based.

The house, precisely 410A, is a characterful historical specimen itself, dusty, yet preserved, the ambiance of its former residents somehow intact in the musty air that swirls with the dust of domestic comfort, worry encircled by thoughts of war. And outside its bucolic facade of wood-paneled, brick-lain modesty, a flag flaps steadily in the calm oceanic summer wind, only it is not Old Glory, but that of Protocinema, and the title of the exhibition, written in Armenian, *A Few in Many Places*. It is the work of independent curator Lila Nazemian in collaboration with members of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), Vartan Avakian, Kristine Khouri, Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh and the welcome inclusion of Mexican-American artist Jesus C. Muñoz.

Inside the quaint, quiet home, there are images posted on the worn walls, the paint of its surfaces chipped, exposing the passage of time, aging, which affects the living and the seemingly inanimate equally. That universal, natural phenomenon, which might be fancily termed senescence, or deterioration over time, essentially makes material vulnerable, not just as concerns its ultimate disappearance, but considering how its memory is kept, handled and remembered while it still retains presence, and echoes with legacy. New York City's chapter of *A Few In Many Places* is a profound, multimedia comment on the sensitivity and significance of personal archives against the consuming tides of ideological national politics.

The installation is delicate, punctuated by used furniture, retro chairs by the fireplace perhaps gleaned from a flea market, their untarnished mahogany patina gleaming in the daylight that filters in through the windows. On one side of a wall, the backs of photos are tacked up above faintly penciled paragraphs, detailing their history. One such piece is dated to 1924, from Jerusalem. It was originally in the possession of a man named Johannes Krikorian. The handwritten wall text describes the portrait, as the man appeared to be "worried," "pensive," his gaze off-center, and that the photo itself looks to have been folded and fit into multiple wallets, pockets and palms throughout its long years.

On the side of the wall where Krikorian stares amiably through that rectangular portal of time known as photography, he is tightly suited, bespectacled, a gentleman of Old World dash. Yet, that it is part of an identity card, and as the curation points to his worried appearance, there is an underlying psychological state of uncertainty at play, like a folk history only partly told, edited, as it were, by the overshadowing enigma of authority. There is also no text beside the full exposure of the portrait, and other images are posted beside it, such as a lone woman in a

traditional skirt, her head shawled, the photo retouched with color evoking the early twentieth century's fascination with new image technology.

The relationship between text and image is carefully conceived throughout the show, where, for example, after participating in the Practitioner-in-Residence workshop at NYU's Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, Muñoz integrated into his piece, *Strawberry Flesh* (2021), a poetic exposition on the coordination of body and mind, as a metaphor for the imagination, sourced in shared movements across continents. In the context of his installation, *A Few In Many Places* is a demonstration of solidarity with respect to minority narratives as they have run the gamut of modernism's failures to accommodate multicultural pluralities in the name of humanist individualism. Embodying themes in Chaghig Arzoumanian's 2016 film, *Geographies*, Muñoz retraced the Mexican-American experience.

The relatively prosaic photographs and texts near the front door of the historic house wrap around toward the installation of Muñoz, which centers around a pile of dirt with a living strawberry plant entangled in it, surrounded by images. In an adjacent salon, the works of Vartan Avakian are more abstract, as the videographer and sculptor explored the roots of photography with a shrewd eye for its slightest emergence. The body itself is dematerialized, transformed and fragmented by modes of imagistic representation. *Suspended Silver* (2015) is a large-format visual piece that conveys the introspective sensitivity of film as comparable to particles of soil, or the fickleness of memory.

*Suspended Silver* is the visualization of archives as data, their reminiscence bursting across a landscape, a surface, a sight. A medium, then, is not just the message it projects, but an emotional sketch, in the form of remains, debris. The authoritative linearity of archives in the hands of programmatic national history, then, becomes unnatural, nothing more than a contrivance of late modernity's undead rattling. The contemporary multimedia landscape is a galactic garden of loose ends and dangling threads that, left untied, speak of a more human embrace with reality as unpredictable as a dream, interconnected and narrative in ways beyond that of a heroic personality cult and its tribalistic sense of monolithic belonging.

To accompany the exhibition *A Few In Many Places*, Protocinema published an edition of their "Protozine," which instills the fervor of their exuberant internationalism through collectivization and timeliness in the art world, with an especially critical grasp of the past, where extant, and its unfading urgency among national communities braced with the task of confronting a conflicting complex of imposed and internalized identities. One text in the Protozine issue, titled *Hands Doubt Moon (I.)*, is the result of collaborative writing with Kathryn Hamilton, Deniz Tortum, Zeynep Kayan, Jorge González and Mari Spirito.

There are scintillating lines drawn from Zeynep Kayan's video, *from one one two one two three* for the group text. They read: "We have to continue what we aimed to start, while we are conscious that nothing is ever certain and nothing ever has integrity." Adapted from a reading of Thomas Bernhard's 1978 book, *Yes*, it is a moving evocation of the repetitions of history and the

simultaneity of their presence. And, arguably, nowhere more so than in the contemporary art field does this become so glaringly apparent, as the instantaneity and multiplication of shared media unfold to bridge the emotional backdrop of humanity's mutual striving throughout history clearest, and at once most distorted.

July 29, 10:44 PM  
New York City, USA

## Pointilist

It is said to be Cologne's first museum, the legacy of an art collector whose last breaths were uttered with the intention of bestowing his city with all of the beauty, grandeur and ideation that he had cultivated, like a gardener of the mind, in private. Its publication, sealed by an architectural prize of a building that displaced a Minorite monastery, was a mid-nineteenth century cause célèbre among the Rhineland culturati, as progressives built the foundations of what is an enlightened region in Germany, a Europeanized field, where industrial workers brush shoulders with cultural producers in an air of liberal inclusivity, though not without its tempests.

Just before its centennial, during World War II, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum endured heavy blows when the Nazis targeted its most famous modern artists as degenerates and came thieving before bombing raids destroyed the structure entirely. Fortunately, artworks were saved, returned and with subsequent donations, the institution stands gleaming, surrounded by outstanding construction projects that continue to revitalize Cologne's historic old town in the shadow of its treasured cathedral. Although a consequence of dusty Western heritage, its collections testify to the West's ardent cultural self-preservation.

Within the canon of impressionists, including Georges Pierre Seurat and Camille Pissarro, to name only two, the technical ingenuities of pointillism gave realistic art a glimmering softness, a subjective patina that riveted the notion of pictorial capture to the wall of mainstream perceptual ideology. The artists had been revolting against the largesse of status quo patronage. For a century past, prior to the involution of form in art, visionaries plunged forth beyond the Christian pale, headed East in search of inspiration, otherness, the magic and mystery of an ancient and deathless muse. But as the years wore on, their canvases simply proved salable and done as the belle époque.

The unrivaled prowess of Paul Signac, however, shot forth despite those painters of the Orientalist persuasion that had preceded him, toward a reexamination of Eastern lands circumscribed or neighboring the Ottoman Empire. What he succeeded in demonstrating, perhaps when seen retrospectively through the eyes of critique, yet nonetheless with meticulously color-coded brush strokes, was how selfishly the creatives of Europe see their abutting civilization. The rulebook of objectivity was being thrown overboard, brazenly unapologetic, and so, Signac did not take it with him when he went to Istanbul in 1907.

The verdant parks and river walks of Cologne are punctuated with the image of a loaned painting, which, only after a close look, a full stop, does its likeness emerge, as that of the skyline in Istanbul's Fatih district, climbing to atmospheric heights at the tips of the Yeni Cami (New Mosque) in Eminönü quarter. It serves as the centerpiece to the exhibition, *Bon Voyage, Signac!*, in which museum-goers are lavished with the piquant graces of the impressionist pantheon. Signac is among the better-known names of Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henry Matisse, and the works are divided between his travels in France, Italy and Turkey.

The occasion is marked by an unprecedented point of museological innovation, namely the restoration of Signac's iconic painting, *New Mosque* (1909), which, according to the curation, was a special apex of delight for the modern architect Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), who enjoyed his fellow Frenchman's pale turquoise vision as the aesthetic apotheosis of Istanbul's unique visage. Signac's wanderlust began as a child of Paris, taking his palette around the countryside, eventually reaching the Italian border, which he crossed, not on commission, but from pure and unadulterated curiosity. The redolence of his footsore passion is apparent.

An avid sailor and impromptu hiker, also going by car and train, Signac braved the landscapes of his far-flung imagination. His bent was southward, where colors beamed all the more vibrant with every step toward the equator, under warmer skies. He was at once a diarist, recalling the brightness of the "Orient" on arrival to the storied piers of Istanbul. Interestingly, the exhibition of *Bon Voyage, Signac!* includes a thoroughly detailed geography of the painter's newfound urban environment, complete with twenty-five landmarks projecting a sense of Istanbul's evergreen seduction for guests, as its pearls of historical fascination have ever attracted seekers of every stripe, intellectual, creative and otherwise.

The permanent loan, by Stiftung Kunst im Landesbesitz (NRW), of Signac's piece *New Mosque* to the collection of the Wallraf-Richartz Museum and Foundation Corboud, the full title of the institution, marks a turning point in public appreciation of a broader scope of impressionist history, encompassing diverse, pictorial representations of Istanbul over the ages. Practically fresh out of his studio, the painting had accumulated a layer of gray dirt, on account of Signac's refusal to varnish the painting, so as not to dull its powerfully emotive colorations. In turn, conservators at the Wallraf-Richartz approached the daunting task of teasing out its underlying paint, stroke by stroke.

After some two hundred hours, a team led by Caroline von Saint-George had followed the master craftsmanship of Signac, every movement of his brush, to the millimeter, an order of work made more difficult due to the technique of Divisionism, behind the unparalleled look of oils exacted by those artists in the Neo-Impressionist camp especially. What has been revealed is an absolutely lucid exercise in color theory, a veritable decomposition of spectral separation defined by luminosity. It was an element of what has become known among postmoderns under the term Visionary Art, that is work suffused with supernatural light. Yet, Signac's painting is grounded by the visibility of its sketched lines, which he formed prior to applying his color schemes.

To see the waters of Istanbul, doused and dashed with such a practiced progression of Europe's deep creative methodologies is renewing. *New Mosque* in particular holds a kind of surprising magic in the fade of its titular focus, blending into the emerald, marine horizon. Signac understood that water was Istanbul's lifeblood and that the city did not bustle, but flowed, by the rudders of its curved sail ships and thin rowboats that once dotted the seascape aplenty, and now hearken to a lost time that Ara Güler steadfastly documented before it vanished.



Although there are a mere three paintings that comprise the “Istanbul” section of *Bon Voyage, Signac!*, with most of the exhibition comprised of his productivity in Italy and France and a healthy smattering of works by other impressive Impressionists, it is still a wonder to behold their exquisite intricacies. Actually, *New Mosque* is decidedly the lesser elaborate of the three. But in its glowing spaciousness, Signac expressed his signature, the technical beauty of color’s relation to light as their harmony creates form. It is as if Signac, finally, was not bluntly imposing European art onto the East, but perhaps, he was instilling a manner of shared humanity in terms of how cities are perceived in nature, like sunlight on water, equally as before a mosque or cathedral on the Bosphorus, Rhine or Seine.

August 3, 11:12 AM  
Cologne, Germany

## Ash

The folkloric verse of African renaissance-man Birago Diop serves as a prefatory muse inspiring the present curation at ifa Gallery Berlin. The six artists whose works are splayed across the floors and walls of the quaint nook of an art space all focused on the animate power of objects to tell stories of collective dispossession. France, Germany and other postcolonial nations with imperial pasts are slowly realizing their historic relationship to the Global South in which they are beneficiaries of their stolen cultural artifacts. Modest shows like that at ifa Gallery Berlin demonstrate a refreshing response to this realization, fomented directly by creatives with backgrounds steeped in regions embattled by undying culture wars with the West.

Over the summer, Berlin buzzed with the opening of its long-anticipated core institution, Humboldt Forum, designed to rival the Louvre. Its inaugural exhibitions shocked all with its retrospective on ivory animal tusks, as the museum's direction provoked the international public to rethink the unfading urgency of history, especially as it concerns Europe in relation to Africa. It was a confrontational gesture that was said to have been intended as an act of transparency during a time when German cultural workers are approaching the mammoth task of repatriating certain unjust acquisitions, effectively stripping tourist attractions that have helped fill municipal coffers for over a century.

In Diop's poem, *Spirits*, he writes that things breathe, that they demand listening more than that which is apparently breathless, and what they breathe is the breath of the ancestors, those unforgotten if nameless past lives who endured the violent thievery of their beloved, tangible heritage, painstakingly crafted and created with ancient multigenerational skill, beautifying their people and lands, imbuing their communities with humanity and meaning since time immemorial. *For the Phoenix To Find Its Form in Us* is a curatorial parable, critiquing the possibility of returning cultural objects through formal restitutions in a world shaken by pandemic ruin as it goes up in flames, its political boundaries long redrawn.

Meanwhile, the disease of colonialism remains in force, however inconspicuously, beyond the forms of its historical precedent. One design of moderns in contemporary art is to stay the tide of technological advance, to ride out its barreling waves on the edges of reason and justice. The younger generation of artists in Europe, especially those with minority backgrounds from the Global South, forward avant-garde styles of communication with the latest exposures of neocolonial manifestation, researching the intimate undercurrents of materiality and documentation with the fine-toothed combs of their conceptual eccentricities.

Entering into the space of ifa Gallery Berlin during the *For the Phoenix To Find Its Form in Us* exhibit is an exercise in mental and emotional patience, as is characteristic of most contemporary sculptural installations. A multifaceted piece by Amsterdam-based Senegalese artist Oumar Mbengue Atakosso, entitled *Lost and Found (Gris Gris)* (2018) neighbors and intermingles with a sculptural work by Palestinian artist Jumana Manna, also a highly perceptive intercultural filmmaker. At ifa Gallery Berlin, Manna demonstrates her peculiar methodology concerning the

spatial reconfiguration and free association of objects. Her work, *Cache (Insurance Policy)* (2019), adapts a feature of Levantine architecture.

Together, beside an object-oriented imagination of the traditional African charm known as “gris gris,” Atakosso contextualized postmodern immigration and conceived its hurdles as a wasteland of geometric artificiality, strewing red safety triangles about the storefront interior, scattering blankets, clothing and various domestic shapes out of a rough, industrial textile. It is as opaque and abstract and as it is plural and alluring. *Lost and Found (Gris Gris)* evokes a comparative relevance adjacent to *Cache* by Manna, which is described as an anthropomorphizing of the *khabya*, seed storage chambers common to homes in Palestine. Manna’s and Atakosso’s works detail the cultural institutionalization of the personal.

While Manna’s piece examined the architecture of museological taxonomy as an extension of capitalist commodification, Atakosso similarly explored the transformative nature of immigration in which, like objects slated for repatriation, immigrants have endured the narrows of the geospatial and bureaucratic rigmaroles that will often haunt their families and communities for generations as they attempt to integrate into the monolithic spheres of neoliberal Western classism. Atakosso, who also heads the audiovisual festival, *Africa in the Picture (AITP)*, as its Executive Director, resorted to a mathematical metaphor by which to explain the fundamental praxis of his artwork.

The concept of “homothecy” (sometimes spelled homothety) is the Russian doll of arithmetic, which Atakosso employed in the sense of personhood as occupying various selves in relation to spatial changes, such as the enlargement of their experience of space, whether on national, cultural, domestic or personal terms. “Gris gris,” then, is a non-Western model of homothecy in that it fixes a point of metaphysical energy to an object. As cultural artifacts are increasingly repatriated to the Global South, it would not be impossible to consider their lives and revisions in Europe as integral to the preservation of their legacy, even once back inside their country of origin. The illusion of return is perhaps naively neocolonial.

An electric piece of work at the ifa Gallery Berlin show is a stop-motion video titled, *The Ballad of Special Ops Cody* (2017) by Iraqi American artist Michael Rakowitz. It is searingly critical, almost to the point of outright mockery, in reference to the degree of absurdity that ensued during the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The pure abstraction of rationality that Rakowitz took as his point of departure encircles the story of a captured American soldier that bristled the ranks of the U.S. military until they realized that their ransom victim, spuriously named John Adam, was none other than a model action figure sold exclusively on U.S. military bases in Kuwait and Iraq.

*The Ballad of Special Ops Cody* goes further, with a well-timed sense of humor, as the toy leads an expedition into the University of Chicago’s Oriental Institute, much of its acquisitions deriving from Iraq’s Mesopotamian archaeology. The action figure of Cody does his best to persuade artifacts to return with him, but they are literally petrified by his example, an unsettling figment of the brutally unstable nation they were displaced from. The plethora of artworks shown

at *For the Phoenix To Find Its Form in Us* are practically bottomless, as is true with a documentary, textual installation by Samia Henni, whose multimedia work, *Archives: Secret Defense?* is a prolific indictment of French colonialism writ large.

August 12, 1:50 PM  
Berlin, Germany

## Migration

When one of the first guest workers from Turkey arrived in Germany in the mid-1950s, they likely rested their weary head on a single bunk bed. They would have hung their collared black and white shirts on hooks by their side and tacked a couple of photographs on the wall where, while dreaming, they might catch the faint shape of their homeland or a portrait of their beloved in the shared darkness.

One such image opens an exhibition titled *In Situ: Photo Stories on Migration*, a unique, reflexive vista exposing Germany's postwar socioeconomic reality. However, with the sheer gravity of its direct and unmitigated pertinence as the assimilated but not entirely integrated children of those workers look back and wonder, if apathetically, at a past that is so defining it is as invisible and immediate as a breath of air.

It is part of that utterly common narrative of human experience that has accompanied modernism like its best secret, unkept, since Eastern and Southern Europe spilled over the piers of Ellis Island daily in the tens of thousands, and as millions of Syrians remake their lives amid the crowded and creaking residential infrastructure of Istanbul. Yet, the collection of seven photos that greets the cultured public at Museum Ludwig is hearteningly intimate.

The men and women of Turkey who went to cities like Cologne, fit to work and prepared for an initial long haul of some three years, would have been pictured to propagandist effect by the officialdoms of German promoters hankering for more temporary laborers whose rights hung in the balance of immigration policy. But the show *In Situ* returns the power of representation to the workers, offering more genuine, personalized glimpses of their lives.

Four young men stayed up late one night, now nearly seventy years ago, in a dim room where they would catch up on greatly needed rest after working every day to resuscitate Germany from its cataclysmic, war-torn defeat just a decade past. They became fast friends as they opened sodas and turned off the radio to listen to their fellow bunkmate tickle the frets of a *bağlama*, a long-necked Anatolian lute generally played in accompaniment to Turkish folk songs.

They dressed in suits and painted the town. Germany, battered and shaken, was theirs to enjoy, naively, toward a new dawn for their respective nations. They might have been walking hand in hand on the same road toward a better world. One of the introductory photos centers a woman on a park bench, adorned in a plaid suit jacket and work pants that fan out at her heels. She was beautifying the fashions of the day, in step with her hosts. Yet, she is shown on her own.

The Turkish men who left for Germany in the years following World War II mirrored tales of their ancestors, many of whom fled the Ottoman Empire for America and were lost to its frenzied opportunism. It was usually the wives who stayed behind, awaiting word of their dear departed husbands. Photographs would have served to calm their hearts, even by the slivers of light that they provided, mere hints of another world, which fragmented their young families.

With a close, studied reading, a photograph also points to experiences outside of its frame, beyond the visible. In that sense, *In Situ* is a welcome curation surrounded by the formidable collections of art history preserved and exhibited at Museum Ludwig, one of Europe's proudest museums. While photography today is taken as instantly as it is seen, families of guest workers in Turkey would wait weeks to receive them from Germany.

At the time, the world moved slower, and its distances seemed longer. When a photograph came into the hands of its intended recipient, they might have been looking at the face of a man whose life had already changed, again, unrecognizable. As is evident in exhibited photos, Turkish men did not only go to Germany to work but also to broaden their minds. They traveled to Paris in groups, ecstatic, stylish, posing on the hood of a car, flashing peace signs.

*In Situ* captures a diversity of Turkish life in Germany, including female workers and the children who went along for the ride. Coifed like Hollywood film stars, a lively pair of Turkish women are shown in a candid photo enjoying the prime of their lives, bedecked in flowery dresses, laughing. In stark contrast, tight-knit rows of factory laborers who look into the flash of a camera, uniformed. One lady smiles next to a frowning coworker with an aloof gaze.

Aerial shots bring the workers' dormitories, or barracks as they're also known, perhaps less invitingly, into full view. These were eyesores of modernist, high-rise architecture. But outside one of them, a man in a suit is happy. It is the day of his wedding. Life just went on for transplants from Turkish society. Ultimately, they were young, and the open border was a boon for their generation, whose factionalized republic was still reeling from the death of its founder.

The scope of *In Situ* is prolific, almost to dizzying effect, as the faded scenes, mostly in black and white, many with aged coloration, exude lives that were as discrete as they are familiar to anyone who has lived in close quarters and known the happiness that comes when living together with kindred souls, bound to a joint struggle, and by the sheer endurance of it appreciating life's smallest joys absolutely.

As curated by architectural historian Ela Kaçel and Barbara Engelbach, in collaboration with the Documentation Center and Museum of Migration in Germany (DOMID), *In Situ* is not only an exhibition of photographs but of print materials and video archives, featuring extensive interviews and thematic research by which to witness and reflect on the legacy of guest workers in Germany, not only Turkish but from many nations in Southern Europe.

As well as being aesthetic, decorative and artistic, photography has a utility, arguably essential to everyday life, as it secures testimony of family connections. Among guest workers, it was a currency of morale, quantifying perseverance with each moment rendered a little more permanent than that of time's irrevocable passing in the face of separations that might have seemed irreconcilable to migratory members of Turkey's more countrified working class.

Interestingly, the curators at Museum Ludwig placed the works of art photographers along with the workers' amateur pictures. The series "Turks in Germany" (1973-1979) by Candida Höfer is a corollary to that of her concurrent, "Turks in Turkey," which she produced in Turkey as a kind of guest worker herself. Her documentary photographs have since graced the halls of Istanbul's galleries, enacting a cyclical vision of reciprocity that remains in motion.

August 18, 11:50 AM  
Cologne, Germany

## Unearthing

The centerpiece of *BEY002* by Paola Yacoub is a large-scale installation of a drawing that the artist made in 1995 at the Institut Français d'Archeologie du Proche-Orient (IFPO) *BEY 002* excavation site. She transformed its likeness into a carpet surrounded by construction scaffolding. It takes up much of the opening section of the compact gallery space at DAADGalerie, a prestigious if modest haunt in Berlin's postwar art scene. Its walls are covered with newspaper cutouts and supplementary drawings to their original scale, as well as a vitrine holding a number of documentary effects, before leading to a projector that clicks automatically, its light beaming against a wall with images from Beirut's embattled, vulgarized core.

In collaboration with the historic Parisian tapestry manufacturer Manufacture nationale des Gobelins, *BEY2002* is a unique work of art: a carpet of a document color-coding Roman, Byzantine, and Hellenistic remains. In a text booklet accompanying the show at DAADGalerie, Yacoub provides ample context to her piece. Citing the scholarship of archaeologist Catherine Aubert, she explains that archaeological evidence points to a correspondence between the ancient Greek island of Delos and the early inhabitants of what is now the city of Beirut.

The tone of the show could be correlated with that of recent works by Turkish artist Barış Doğrusöz, whose multi-film installation *Locus of Power* opened Salt Galata's ten-year anniversary programming, "The Sequential." His shrewd examination of archaeological perspectives in war-torn Syria, and their relativity to conflict, past and present, echoes Yacoub's perspective. In 1996, the public enjoyed a rare ten-day window in which they had the opportunity to bear direct witness to the *BEY002* site. In turn, Yacoub reflected on the nature of excavating in the wake of the Lebanese Civil War as a layered, manifold process of destruction. She used the neologistic term, "archaeocalypitic," to encompass the devastating force involved.

Such urban archaeological work cleanses the contemporaneity of an inner-city space, turning it back to its ancient roots. It is marked by a kind of indirect, often underhanded dialogue between living, local communities and with the overarching, current social reality of a metropolis and its national, or even international, integrity. An astute reader from Istanbul might remember the Haydarpaşa train station that since 2018 has become the grounds of archaeological studies, effectively stalling hopes of the general populous that its once-functioning train line will be renewed.

With reference to the thought of new realist Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris, Yacoub defends her document-carpet, reading into the idea that ruins are documents, and that modern people are tasked with becoming literate in them. They must not only understand what happened, but have a sense of shared responsibility for their preservation, or natural decay. Comparatively, the modernist Greek poets Constantine Cavafy and George Seferis became utterly famed and canonized in Western literature by foregrounding metaphors of broken columns and classical appreciation, themes that remain integral to the formation of historical identity.



And ruminating on the geopolitical trenches of the storm-cast region in which Lebanon and its material legacy are situated, much in the way that Doğrusöz did in the northern deserts of the Levant, Yacoub bemoans the persistent traffic of “blood antiquities” newly spurred by the fascistic art thieves of Lebanon. Yacoub's essay, “BEY 002, This is not a fiction, 2021,” comprises these phenomena by the term “metrukiyet,” a word once common to Turkish and Arabic meaning “abandonment.” When the infamous port explosion brought a weakened Beirut to its knees on Aug. 4, 2020, that withdrawal, that abandoning increased drastically.

Since that fated day, the earthbound foundations of Lebanon’s cultural precedent have become fainter as the crumbling of the reigning power structure fell squarely and unavoidably into everyone’s lap, its relics covered with fresh dirt. The debris of the modern city imploded into its own catastrophic and enigmatic history of ruins, fragmented alongside that of its predecessors’ once-treasured architectural, domestic and artistic roots. Yacoub wrote, dramatically, yet appropriately: “Our world has fallen apart. Transposing this document onto a carpet seems like a desperate gesture.”

But in true local fashion, Yacoub retained her sense of humor, that Middle Eastern affinity for survival through mockery and self-deprecation. *BEY002* includes a selection of newspaper clippings, full-page spreads tacked on the wall over the central installation that detail the caricatured responses that the educated class of news writers and critics stirred up amid the outright national collapse. She has a kindred spirit with the cartoonist Boo, who, in one piece that she featured illustrated a building in crisis. Flames encircle its ground floor, and on its rooftop business owners walk on M.C. Escher-like stairs.

The terrifying and the banal blend in Boo’s building in crisis is a microcosm of Lebanon as a whole where on one floor people are smoking and chatting benignly, while just below them, refugees are fleeing on airborne tethers. Above them, the military patrols, and the whole place is for sale. That dualism is likened to Yacoub’s mentioning of midcentury author Jean Paulhan, who wrote about the interchangeability of maintenance and terror. His work of literary criticism, *The Flowers of Tarbes, or Terror in Literature* (1941), forwards pioneering discourse on the role of art in politics and society.

On the one hand, intervention is necessary for the upkeep or spring cleaning of multi-use public space, demonstrating the very notion of urbanization as the overlap of multigenerational inhabitation alongside constructs of globalized commerce and cultural expression. But when done forcibly, acts of historical conservation assume the qualities of terror, perhaps like in jungles and rainforests, which, when distraught by the compulsion to save endangered species, then confront human communities who have subsisted and continue to rely on the harvest of their traditional ecosystems, including otherwise protected animals.

Through various media, images, text or both, Yacoub tells the story of her birthplace of Beirut with one eye closed so that she might focus in, more closely than others, at subjects that might

have gone unnoticed under a more Orientalist gaze. Hers is a keen eye for the intellectual bridge that, unbroken, binds Lebanon to the soul of Western art. This is clear in her piece titled *Elagabalus* (2021), which is a collection of Roman coins gleaned from the excavation site that she drew and remade into the carpet. These objects point to the story of a self-destructive emperor, immortalized by playwright Antonin Artaud.

In his 1979 book about the anarchist ruler, Artaud wrote: “But there are stones which are alive, just like plants or animals are alive, and just as we could say that the sun, with its spots which shift, swell and deflate, ooze into each other, merge and are one more displaced – and when they swell or shrink, do it rhythmically and internally – so one might say that the sun is alive. It is as if this anarchy still haunts our lands.” With that, the French avant-garde thinker has exposed the underlying possibility that ruins, buried many times over, are as capriciously human as anyone walking over them, however unknowingly.

August 26, 12:24 PM  
Berlin, Germany

## Earthbound

It is not the first time that Paris-born ceramist Defne Küçük has shown her work at Schneidertempel, which is still affectionately known as the Tailor's Synagogue by descendants of its Turkish-Jewish community of Eastern European extraction. In 2011, she mounted a show in the temple titled *Duwardakiler* in Turkish, which roughly translates to "On the Wall." It is a suitable phrase for her works, which have a levity, as their sculptural elements are suspended within a more pragmatic and earthly field, such as that bounded by the form of a plate.

To Küçük, a plate holds the same inspiration and utility as a canvas does for painters. She has said as much. Her approach to the figurative is framed by the soil-based worldliness of her chosen medium; ceramics. One of her earlier works adapts Jewish iconography, particularly that of the Torah scroll. Under a faint, naive engraving of a Star of David at the top of a ruddy brown oval, she placed three likenesses of the parchment scrolls for a piece, *Acknowledgments*, perhaps a nod to where she has come to find a home for her art.

Another work, which she produced before her current avian theme, is called, *Mediterranean*. Although forming what appears to be whirlpools of seawater, the whorls bear an uncanny resemblance to her miniature Torahs, when seen from above. Her work, *Mediterranean 2* arranges various shades of blue, almost mosaic-like, or even pixellated. Its visual appeal is reminiscent of a video installation, *Bosphorus: Data Sculpture*, by Turkish new media artist Refik Anadol.

The merging of ultramodern aesthetics with that of prehistoric tradition is a part of the superlative gift of a contemporary ceramic artist, a stream of artistic craft that runs deep in Turkey's complex grasp of cultural modernism, from Füreyâ Koral to Alev Ebüzzîya Siesbye. Trained in archaeological art history, much of Küçük's work stems from her appreciation of the ancient past. The appearance of age, of faded surfaces and worn imperfections, characterizes her oeuvre, which echoes everything from Ottoman cemeteries to Hittite reliefs.

In her artist statement, Küçük speaks on behalf of her muse: birds. Animals who, as she quotes, are philosophically inclined. She proclaims that they are right when they affirm that everyone enriches the Earth and the greater multiverse, embodying different frequencies, yet within the same wholeness. It is after this frequency or vibration of birds that Küçük has delivered her latest series of sculptural ceramics, departing from the plate to tree branches, from domestic practicality to pure decoration.

Although manifold in form, Küçük's painterly expressionism captures the musicality of avian harmony, not by the sound of their songs, but by the color of their feathers. Her works in *Bird Frequency* explore spectra of color as yet unseen in her previous creations. Yet, as with her piece, *Hamuşan*, titled after an Ottoman word for Sufi cemeteries, Küçük plumbed the depths of Turkish art history, using the octagonal star that remains ubiquitous in the tangible heritage of Islamic Istanbul to adapt the shape of Turkey's medieval tombstones.

In an era of social engagement and radical intervention in the art world, the quaint modesty of *Bird Frequency* is, while perhaps anachronistic, a refreshing delight of a detour off the beaten path of the international cultural establishment as it reaches for exposure and legitimacy along Istanbul's European fringe. Küçük faces her seers from another vantage point, one steeped in the quiet poise of nature, nonetheless proud and full of the kind of beauty that is visible on a bird's feathers, one so fickle, distant, finally captured to timeless effect. Küçük wrote a personal reflection to preface the works that grace the walls leading to the Ashkenazi altar, as the light of the city's marine ecology filters through the multicolored stained glass and into the historic house of worship for Yiddish-speaking Black Sea migrants. She thought of her childhood, when she lived in attics, close to birds. That her art speaks to her inner child, and from a girl's perspective, might conjure thematic parallels to the work of Turkish American painter Ayşe Wilson.

The artist still lives in an attic, only now she calls it the terrace floor. It is something mythological to imagine a young person looking out of the tops of an apartment building in Paris, dreaming of becoming an artist, watching as the wings of birds flap, carrying them away. Some of the more migratory ones maybe even travel as far as Istanbul, a place of perennial dreaming for French painters down the ages, such as for postimpressionist Paul Signac, whose pointillist pictures of fin-de-siècle Istanbul remain at the center of art curation in Europe.

The delicate immersion of Küçük's ceramic birds are profound, as they stand in relation to the geometric designs of their environment. One piece has a varied aesthetic of blues, quoting from the primeval line etchings that have chronicled the course of human creativity since the Neolithic era. And she even adds a touch of Japanese philosophy, namely that of the "kintsugi" technique, in which pottery is broken and reattached, its cracks gilded, accentuated, so as to celebrate the wonders of imperfection, the vulnerability of material, and being, to life. The birds that she pictures are magically realistic, fusing a sense of pointillism and mosaic into a flat, miniature fold. The tufts that seem to waver atop their heads are majestic, like crowns, or vegetal headdresses, and their wings, also become plantlike, particularly in a plate that is mostly green in its coloration. Küçük demonstrates certain skill as a painter, as the pieces are largely comprised of sketches etched over the surfaces of her ceramic works. But she also crafted the effigy of a bird in one teal-hued square set within an earth-brown bowl.

Many of her fellow ceramists, and to a great extent many folks who stream through the commercialized alleys of Galata, might see her work as derivative, fit for a shop but not a unique show in a gallery. They would have a point, but the plainness of a white, featureless dove grasping an artificial branch in the congregant hall of an empty synagogue is no less poignant, its relevance perhaps demanding a stretch of the imagination to see just how nature and history often meet along points of their mutual vanishing. And in walks art.

September 2, 1:45 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Feast

Despite the climate of bald commerciality, the prolific multi-gallery fair ambiance of Artweeks@Akaretler has a certain historical, if not entirely critical, appeal from an academic or curatorial standpoint. The collections of so many galleries, and even private corporations, are, as it were, unveiled, revealing an enviable degree of insight into the backstories of the art world in Turkey – which a monthly solo or group show might not encompass due to the dedication of its conceptual focus or commitment to a specific collection.

Within the breezy strip of swanky apartments in Istanbul's Beşiktaş district, a smorgasbord of artworks grace the floors and walls, cleanly presented and timed to coincide with the reopening of the new art season, as Istanbul's summery atmosphere cools and beckons people inside, comforted by the opportunity to see the fruits of local creatives in dialogue with the international cultural establishment. One striking observation, literally the translation of *Rasat*, a curation by Sinan Eren Erk at Yıldız Holding, is of a piece by Halil Altındere beside a Picasso.

Last year, Altındere, an inveterate trickster of artistic satire, produced a folding book of miniatures titled, *The Lawyer of Sultan Süleyman Going to Friday Prayer* (2020). It is a strong adaptation of the traditional Islamic arts of miniature and calligraphy, a series of fourteen watercolors and gold on vegetal dyed paper with handmade “muraqqa” (a miniature painting technique). Many of the paintings consist of men in lavish Ottoman palace garb walking as they might have four hundred years ago. But here, and there, are twenty-first-century detours.

A man in a robe with a tall, feathered conical hat rides an electric scooter, the type normally seen among tourists on route to espy his very outfit, or likenesses of it, in works of art similar to that which Altındere quoted for his humorous invention. To conclude the illustrations, a group of multicolored youth in contemporary clothes stand behind a sign that reads, “Vegan.” The cognitive dissonance is as brilliant as the artist's technical precision. The India ink sketch, *Picador in the Arena* (1959) by Picasso has an eastward relevance next to Altındere's outlook.

In that same room is a photograph altered to Japan's “kintsugi” style of broken pottery. The image, by Sarkis Zabunyan (known as Sarkis), is of the interior of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque. The seasoned Paris-based artist from Istanbul made the piece in 2021, although its methods are directly related to his solo exhibition, *Untitled*, mounted at Dirimart in late 2020. The decontextualized reshowing of such pieces, after their institutional curations, might trigger debates about art as commodified objects, a critique that has raged since time immemorial among artists, dealers and collectors.

Another Istanbul-based artist, although of a younger generation, has a more unaffected, also personal approach to the legacy of miniature painting as it reemerges in contemporary art. Yuşa Yalçıntaş, represented by Pi Artworks, has leapt from the ground of his previous works, experimenting with his curious architectural geometries that touch on themes apparent in ancient

Central Asian Turkic cultures. Under the title, *House Kite* (2021), his piece of figurative drawing centers a carpet-adorned yurt at the end of kite strings flown by children.

When considering the public display of *House Kite* by Yalçıntaş, the significance of Artweeks@Akaretler increases as a forum for previewing young artists' works prior to their formalized exhibition. It is a sneak peek into yet discovered worlds of creative venturing, which is especially spectacular to note following the unprecedented degree of introversion that artists use as fertile soil to inspire visionary growth. That worn, organic metaphor is not lost on abstract ceramicist Burçak Bingöl, whose installation, *Cargo* (2019) is refreshingly eccentric.

As part of Zilberman Gallery's addition to the fair, Bingöl's delicate wooden shelving holds a library of gleaming clay wares, perhaps once-practical mugs and pots, overgrown with coral-like layers of what looks like marine minerals, but with a kind of dysphoric malaise reminiscent of industrial waste sludge, discolored and almost grotesque. Bingöl animates objects with a deathly sheen. Her ceramics are like bodies spent, weighed and sickened by the mass corruption of materiality in the wake of capitalist overconsumption.

On the other side of the spectrum, Antonio Cosentino, a Turkish artist of Italian descent, repurposes found materials to create vessels, crafts and characters for his fictional universe of narratives, maps and personalities. He is a wide-eyed literary artist with a bent toward story, and his artworks are figments of his imagined sets, designed from time to time in the context of a performance. One of his favorite materials, tin, forms the structure of his pristine model car, *Ferâre* (2015), parked under his pop-vein oil painting, *Butcher Cemal* (2011).

The prevalence of craft over concept, of making over thought is perpetually upheld by artists like Yalçıntaş, an old-school draftsman, and by painters, who remain in force in Istanbul's art scene, as is evident at Artweeks@Akaretler, particularly in the flat hosted by x-ist, where the oils of Aylin Zaptçioğlu detail her fantastical, otherworldly imagination. Her untitled canvas portrays a girl racing with an excited dog as her feet are planted into the frozen splash of puddles. Their monochrome, gray coloration is set against a pinkish background.

Zaptçioğlu's canvas hangs beside a quartet of smaller paintings, each one exuding the fairy dust of legend, like meticulous snapshots of an adolescent mind hooked on tales of fictitious lands, fabricated objects, dream-like in their phenomenal mirroring. In the same room, a trio of oil paintings by Seda Hepsev is more quotidian, yet stirs a visual sensation of the sublime in the immaculately round textures of her pale, palpable colors. The knot of a curtain becomes voluptuous in her hands, its contours utterly sensuous.

One of the more exciting vistas at Artweeks@Akaretler is curated by Pilevneli Gallery, specifically for exhibiting paintings by Ali Elmacı, Tarık Töre and Erdoğan Zümrütoğlu, whose brash styles are distinctive not only of their generation, its coloring outside the comfort zones of aesthetic decor, but of Pilevneli as a gallery that has a powerful voice, bridging the gap where

pop art brushes shoulders with critical sophistication. Töre and Elmacı share an affinity for brazen, cartoonish portraiture that evokes video game sport and social media saturation.

Zümrütoğlu is an abstract expressionist writ large, although often stressing more on the abstract, his color fields are dominated by shapeshifting forms that seem to bend and assimilate recognizable objects, only to fall away into faded blurs of his generously vibrant palette, swarming with touches of formal potential that prompt seers to think for themselves of just what might have been if the artist wanted to capture thingness. But shying from the absolutism of readymade semblances is cathartic during a fair replete with mostly rectangular objects that scream for attention under the blinding white lights of art's irrational popularity.

September 9, 2:02 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Intercity

As a young man from southeastern Turkey's Diyarbakır province, Ahmet Ögüt, now in his fortieth year, traveled by bus across the stretch of Turkey's vast heartlands. He boarded the musty coaches, the synthetic white paint of their rearview mirrors chipped, the upholstery of their seats torn, and might have opened books by Italo Calvino, or Yunus Emre. As he grew older, he was likely devouring texts on journalism and law in reference to the issues that concerned him, coming from a region defined by internalized confrontation, and an overwhelming need to leave. He has done as much, resettling in Berlin and Amsterdam, where he continues to expand his prolific body of work.

*It can and has been* is the title of his dynamic solo exhibition at Dirimart, an overdue return to the Turkish art world on the cusp of epochal changes. The words, "can," and "has," refer to Turkish vocabulary, "live," and "authentic," loosely translated, respectively. Their display on the front window of a reconstructed bus installed in the gallery recalls the catchy slogans stuck onto such vehicles, as they have become culturally iconic to the Anatolian kitsch that affirms the hyperlocal, landlocked relationship between Istanbul and the rest of Turkey. Inside, a round of seats slowly turns, automatically, in reverse, as it were, back in time and place.

Across from a bleary window with a decal prohibiting cellphones, Ögüt pasted a touristic landscape collage of Diyarbakır, foregrounding its ancient aqueducts and castle walls which changed hands across millennia of overlapping empires. One of its iconic, rectangular minaret towers is wrapped in blue plastic, warning sightseers of dangers unseen, and for many, left unknown. It is part of the unsettling grab that Ögüt's art effects, prompting an intervention into the Turkish art scene that crashes through the walls of its institutions and invites its public to follow the roots of Turkey's identity crises. But he speaks of it in the language of visual art.

*It can and has been* alters the warehouse interior of Dirimart like no other exhibition in recent memory. Emerging from the front of the bus, it then wraps around to a second entrance, through a newly renovated sculpture garden where past works of Ögüt are exhibited. Titled, *Living Being Squatting Institutions* (2020), the trio of pieces, made with cast polyester resin fused to marble dust, are dedicated to animals who have lived in and around the buildings of the art world, like the peregrine falcons at the Tate Modern, or the Weimaraner dog at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The realist likenesses of animals and their host institutions stand, quite proudly, under a waving, gray flag that reads, in Turkish, *If You'd Like to See This Flag in Colors, Burn It* (homage to *Marinus Boezem* (2017)). Soon after the opening at Dirimart, a spectator did in fact follow the directions on the flag, a stunt that had never been dared since the artist started to exhibit the piece four years ago. He laughed, apparently. Maybe he thought, "Only in Turkey." And once back indoors, a neon sign by Ögüt reads, again, as translated, *He Actually Made Good Paintings* (2019), referring to the popular trope that all artists must also be painters. The phrase surfaced on Turkey's trendy online forum, "ekşi sözlük" (literally meaning, sour dictionary). In response,



Öğüt is showing a series of drawings, but he has made it difficult for people to stand, not for the works exactly, but at all. On a vertigo-inducing floor pitched about forty-five degrees, are his collages, drawings and adaptations of mail art. The drawings quote extraordinary moments in recent history, as when Saudi Arabia became the first nation to give citizenship to a robot in 2017. The lifelike, feminine visage of the Hanson Robotics manufacture is stunning, as he notes, in a country where women's rights are under duress.

*It can and has been* almost feels like having wandered into the storied Wonderland of Lewis Carroll, only the late, white rabbit is the art world, Alice is the public, and Turkey the land of wonder. With each of Öğüt's pieces, the world becomes smaller, and larger, never quite fitting to the right proportions. As intrepid walkers to Dolapdere quarter go in and see for themselves, the curatorial area around the back of the bus is furnished with a staircase whose stairs revolve according to the conflicted neighborhood history in which authorities and painters argued between vivid colors and gunmetal grays for who might decorate their city as theirs.

There is a short, three-plus-minute video, *Worker's Ordinary Day* (2019) installed above the staircase, a quaint documentation of a hot air balloon's drifting. It adds a playfulness to the humdrum, urban aesthetic that floats about the show, and settles within the bowels of the bus in the form of an overnight lodge, with a well-made bed, telephone, television, adapting a luxury room at the Big London Hotel in Pera. The intervention is a dedication to road workers who must drive to live between routes like that between Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Art lovers can experience their invisibility one hour at a time in the compact, bookable room.

The concluding segment of the sprawling, multidimensional exhibition is a room modeled after one of Istanbul's best-known, since shuttered cinemas. It was a haunt for worker-intellectuals to debate the significance of their celluloid cultural heritage as it flashed before their tea-spiked minds. And now, in Dirimart, the seating is carefully constructed to transport seers back to a time when freewheeling conversation coursed out of the alleys of Taksim and into the hearts of the Internet-born youth of today, whose undying nostalgia for the progressive glories that once were is as desperate as it is real.

Öğüt trains his focus with stylistic abandon, screening two film collages, back to back, that animate the tensions between art and individuality, where the realm of the personal is hijacked in the name of social creativity for *Artworks Made at Home*, or where artists transcend the bounds of their singularly visual media, and explore the pop modes of music and its consumable production. *Artists Making Music* (2021), co-commissioned by Protocinema and Asia Society Museum in New York, embodies the ejecting force that art provokes in its makers and takers, those who have careened off the edge of knowability to traverse a plane of being instilled with inward direction, however obscure, not unlike aspiring artists leaving the endless summers of Diyarbakır for the fading lights of Istanbul, and the world.

September 15, 4:50 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Inconceivable

There is a triangular tension at the roots of Protocinema, which might help to understand its underlying relationship to the greater art world in terms of the exhibitions that it programs near and far, yet with its own special communal solidarity that is as bewildering as the success of globalization itself. The three modes of its ideological drama might be characterized by its commitment to remote site-specificity, in which artworks are often planted or transplanted off the beaten path of the cultural establishment, for example recently on Governor's Island in New York, or a worker's factory in an ancient quarter of Istanbul.

Then, there is the homeless itinerancy of its apparent disillusionment with what it calls "brick and mortar" institutions, which are housed in buildings. The idea is to have the cake of institutional integrity, and eat it too, anywhere, like a picnic that has become ritualized to the point of acquiring staff. Its ideals of artist sustainability are referred to in natural terms, as if art were an ecology maintained in a traveling botanical garden, requiring ingredients as simple as air and light. The mood is reminiscent of a biosphere, perhaps, a microcosm of the art world, appearing in many ways just like it, but somehow entirely other, like bizarro Jerry from *Seinfeld*.

In the name of accessibility and universality, its practices and results, seem, at last, utterly exclusive, and as far-flung as it is far-fetched. And in terms of quality, it succeeds if hype were the measure of its aptitude. Instead, it becomes a haphazard reflection of the nuances that challenge Istanbul's contemporary art establishment from dialoguing more profoundly, expressly and genuinely with the world beyond national boundaries. In turn, Protocinema is a starry-eyed fantasy of globalist cosmopolitanism. And that dead air features a new installation by Gülşah Mursaloğlu within a stand of pillars at Beykoz Kundura, a former shoe factory turned cultural venue on the Asian side of Istanbul, as part of *Once Upon a Time Inconceivable*. Mursaloğlu produces curious, eccentric ready-made sculptural inventions using a complex of organic and industrial materials, timed to adapt to their environment.

Mursaloğlu's piece *Merging Fields, Splitting Ends* (2021) investigates the nature of heat through sewn bioplastic sheets hung over buckets of simmering water. In relation to the essay that Protocinema founder Mari Spirito wrote to accompany the exhibition for ProtoZine, a thin pamphlet self-published on the occasion of their ten-year anniversary, *Merging Fields, Splitting Ends* assumes the metaphor of material transformation as linked to the upheavals of body and mind that have ensued across the planet in the wake of the pandemic. Her writing, "No Small Itch" is a sincere reflection. Spirito has also written that art has the "capacity to create intimacy; it does have a way of healing wounds, and better yet of making it apparent that not all wounds need healing and not all scars are ugly." Reinforcing her conclusion with a footnote to British writer Olivia Lang does not justify such quixotism.

The question is always one of art's blatant purposelessness, and at once, its glamor on the center stage of a society fed by capitalist commodification, the fetishization of all experience into things, and finally, the undying romance of Western rationalism as the backbone of

pseudoscientific vindications for the gross inequalities of birthright citizenship. But it is exactly its futility as a functional economic entity in league with the norms of social progress that make art so perfectly valuable, and that express the essence of its existence as integral to the experience of being human.

As the late German novelist Thomas Mann wrote in his recently reissued book, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918), “the exquisite superiority of art over simple intellectuality lies in art’s lively ambiguity, its deep lack of commitment, its intellectual freedom.” It is the case that some works at the new Protocinema exhibition, *Once Upon a Time Inconceivable*, could be said to represent the spirit of Mann’s statements, which echo in a world, as Spirito wrote in her essay, where workers are increasingly hesitant to go back to the humdrum office after over a year of forced, private reflection. Yet, their curatorial rhetoric is still bent on worldly pragmatics.

The screening of *Quarry* (2015), a video by American artist Amie Siegel, is critical, complex, vivid and lucid, making it, arguably, the immediately consumable of the works at *Once Upon a Time Inconceivable*. It strikes an intellectual chord that rings into the conceptualist’s beloved noosphere. Reminiscent of films by Rosa Barba or Ali Mahmut Demirel, the sweeping cinematographic precision of her celluloid photography has a gravity that aligns with her subject, namely the marble gleaned from Vermont fated to fortify the high towers of the New York nouveau riche.

*Quarry* might be aptly symbolic for art institutions within Istanbul’s relatively young and undervalued art scene in comparison to global capitals where Protocinema tends to pivot their multi-city exhibitions. While Salt celebrates its tenth anniversary as Arter still settles into its new museum and Istanbul Modern is at the mercy of Istanbul’s ubiquitous construction, the art landscape in Turkey is spread thin, too often sourced in other times and places, only to be polished and erected as if its curations were as native as the Bosphorus. If contemporary art emphasizes its context, Istanbul’s artists, curators and institutions would do well to remember what urbanist Jane Jacobs said, that cities are not buildings, but people.

Ceal Floyer’s *Overgrowth*, a slide projection of a small bonsai tree enlarged to the size of a wall, proposes another form of monitoring. The dimensions of the tree are determined only by the projector's distance from the wall, making the space between the wall and the projector the main issue, rather than the projected image. This only still image of the show enables viewers to reflect on proximity and distance and their inherent relativity. Speaking of the slide, Protocinema has always winked at the moving image and the big screen. Even its name is taken from a quote in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* by Werner Herzog. In a scene showing one of the earliest discovered cave paintings that depicts animals with eight legs instead of four, Herzog thinks that perhaps this man is the first to represent movement and implies that it's like protocinema (as in the predecessor of cinema). Protocinema is also on the move.

September 22, 1:39 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Readymade

The ghost of Marcel Duchamp haunts the streets of Istanbul. His silhouette disappears five floors up in the storied Ralli Apartment of Şişli, where, for over a decade, long lines have formed to enter the Syrian Consulate. But above its world-weary concerns, the logic of the ordinary is flipped on its head, as the modern art concept of the readymade assumes a localized Turkish air in the deft hands of artist Şakir Gökçebağ, whose inventive sculptures perform magic tricks with the normative appearances and functionality of everyday, domestic objects.

A net, strung with clothespins comes to project an exotic naturalism, something among palm trees and calabash gourds. It conjures tropical scenes of fishermen hauling mounds of striped scales, their fins and tails flapping in the humid, balmy vision of waves and workers. But the materials are liable to be found in an office drawer. It is their suspension, and the patterns of their repetition that provoke the imagination to tip the scales of wonder just enough so normality is exposed as a thin, even transparent layer of awareness.

The artist, like the poet, is a seer. They impart the gift of sight, not merely physical, but toward the merging of the intellect with that of the eye, to see, anything, more consciously, more creatively. It is part of modernism's escape from the confines of canvas frames and sculpture mantles on which so many busts and portraits have lionized the Western canon to a deliriously self-congratulating effect. Arthur Rimbaud said it best, that the poet, equally the artist, is a visionary after a "long, boundless, and systematized disorganization of all the senses."

One of the first interventions that Gökçebağ effected in the decidedly white cube space of Ferda Art Platform was a spatial normalizer, placing tools used to measure the straightness of walls and fixtures that bubble up, floating between lines to indicate exactness, levelness, the total bore of sensual perfection, flat and ready, already made. Gökçebağ has overstepped the boundaries of the readymade, returning its artistic potentiality to its roots in sculpture, but also further, in dialogue with traditional Turkish crafts.

In the contemporary art vernacular, there is what is called a gesture, which is different from a notion, altogether separate from an idea, and twice removed from that overriding principle of the concept. They are characterized by the performative resonance of installation as an extension of the artwork. To open *Redimeyd*, for example, there is a work by Gökçebağ entirely consisting of coat hangers, tacked to the wall as such, and even furnished with someone's jacket, just for that finishing touch. The coat hangers form an "X" shape, somehow impractical when considering the alphabetical aesthetic in contrast with the linearity of its standard usage. There are two coats, hanging from the tops of the piece, for the symmetrical impact. And across the room, on the other side, is a veritable optical illusion of brooms, sliced sidelong and placed successively, conducting a sense of movement, however, still by the accent on the modified shape of the cleaning utensil. Its dialogue with emptiness, or clarity, is, in that sense, apt.

Straightway toward the back of Ferda Art Platform, entering the gallery, there is a trio of works reminiscent of Bauhaus textiles whose color schemes and geometric patterns unfold out across the contiguous halls of *Redimeyd* as it encompasses special reinterpretations of the Turkish rug. In certain homes across Anatolia, these ancient carpets are displayed, not merely to cover the floor, but also as wall decorations. With a mind for negative capability, Gökçebağ cut into a variety of rugs, splaying them out, almost as if they were pieces of paper.

In one corner, the hems of a rug are all that remains, except for a single strip that goes through its body, off-center, though absolutely in line with the angular exactitude of the building's architecture. Like the piece with the brooms, there is an optical illusiveness to the work as well, as it occupies a degree of realism, subjecting the space to its quirks as its lines are in direct dialogue with reference points that the eye would make to stabilize its seer within the blank whiteness of the gallery cube. The snaking tendrils of one carpet, carved into a single squiggle, has transformed the traditionalism of a folkloric craft into an abstraction of high contemporary art, playing with the choruses of reason that stigmatize change in the face of total metamorphosis. But there is a proud essence of the carpet's magic at work yet, in its configuration, captivating as the art of paper marbling, resonant with its mythological spirit among the fairytale ambiance of its origins in legends.

Another altered carpet work dances, inanimately, with special fascination, as it is exhibited almost entirely intact, with only two fine incisions through its core, which, piecemeal, then wrap around its rectangular body to form galactic spirals. The motive quality of the piece stands in contrast with the other works along the same lines, which have more of a fixedness. They are not so much "ready-made" as they are adjustments of the customary objects, both as they are used among the vocabulary of domesticated modernity and that of undying tradition.

One room is dedicated to an installation of machine-manufactured metal soup ladles. There is a line of nails on the wall, with which they are held up, their handles sticking out in various directions. The sensibility of the exhibition surpasses linguistic interpretation and has an abstract sculptural drift, which is enough to smile at and walk away having had an encounter with familiar objects lightened out of the gravity of their daily use by the art context. That, then, is the role of contemporary art as it plucks its lovers out of quotidian monotony.

In 1917, Duchamp had a studio in Manhattan where he kept many of his ready-mades, including the *Bicycle Wheel* (1916), and a coat-rack piece titled, *Trap* (1917), which might have been a direct influence on Gökçebağ. Duchamp was repulsed by the idea that art would be pigeonholed to a single sense perception, namely sight. He called it "retinal art" and wanted to challenge the prevalence of handmade goods as part of the mainstream definition of art by foregrounding the fruits of factory labor. Gökçebağ has continued that conversation with "Redimeyd," accenting the cultural relativity of ordinariness as expressed in objects.

September 29, 11:11 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Homebody

As part of their tenth-anniversary series, “The Sequential,” Salt has engaged with artists from Turkey who are of a generation defined by their upbringing in the 1990s. In simple terms, they are old millennials whose taste for Internet culture and the lingering whiffs of pop nostalgia run deep in their veins, allowing them access to the more corporatized engines of social media, while with a certain poignant grasp of a past that now seems like the rustic countryside – a time when the early web instilled the fantasies of remoteness and obscurity and a cybersurfer could even find a sense of solitude online.

But now, that has all changed. And the perfect happiness of being comfortably alone is increasingly infiltrated by data miners out for the next blip that might more closely quantify the subliminal consciousness of decision-making. And what is there to do, when, day after day, and night after night, the television light glares, the music blares, and every wall and surface is open to a black hole of stares. That is the tone of a work by Volkan Aslan, which is quite brave in its personal exposure, offering the public a six-minute window into a life, led with a kind of interminable impatience, behind closed doors.

In that way, the pandemic can be said to owe its metaphorical atmosphere to Samuel Beckett's classic modernist play *Waiting for Godot*, which the Irish dramatist conceived as an existential vision of secular messianism. In fact, *Stay Safe* (2021) by Aslan is based on another literary reference, one closer to home on the shores of Istanbul. Its themes are said to adapt the short story, *The Stelyanos Hrisopulos* by the legendary island hermit of a writer, Sait Faik Abasıyanık, who, in 1936, published his evergreen piece. The plot centers around an orphaned child who builds a life-sized toy ship, and even if a group of jealous children capsizes it in the style of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, his unflagging spirit is untamed.

Another contemporary Turkish artist of Italian heritage, Antonio Cosentino has previously gleaned inspiration from that same story for his works, and even built a likeness of the fictional ship and performed its exhibition through the streets of Istanbul. Aslan is more conceptual in his approach to representing the significance of the ship, which might reflect a universal encapsulation of what it means to endure the swarms of envy and disaster just for being different, even as every individual is already different. And nowhere is that clearer than when alone.

The basement curation of *Stay Safe* is appropriate, as the unlit, confining depths of the old bank coalesce with the themes represented in the piece, of loneliness, solitude and the psychological immersion that ensues in its wake. The motif of cleanliness recurs throughout Salt Galata in the short-loop video series, *I am troubled like the people who cannot weep for the dead* (2018-2021).

Flat monitors projecting the work are placed neatly around the building, above its entranceway, largely unnoticed, or leaning against walls along the marble stairwells. To clean the petals of a flower the video projects is reminiscent of the Shakespearian adage, “to paint the lily.” The rush of clear water as it gleams and falls over the colorful bursts of blossoms expands on the idea of

aesthetic excess, and the overriding obsessions with surface cleaning, both of bodies and of the superficies over which most people live, unaware of scientific realities, and in particular the physiological phenomena, that have shaken the modern world to its core. Toward the top floor ceiling of Salt Galata, Aslan installed a seamlessly interwoven sculpture and intervention into the intricate, neoclassical architectural interior. They are, respectively, *Scenery* (2021) and *Water* (2021).

The cool blue light that emanates through the glass-paneled roof is courtesy of the artist's chosen tint, which saturates the air with a cool, blue filter. The atmospheric effect is ameliorative, cleansing, and the cardboard mock-up wave, evocative of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Japanese ukiyo-e artist Hokusai. And within an adjacent hall, a two-channel video work, *Best Wishes* (2019) screens with its impeccable cinematography. The piece tells the story of someone who sits at home rewriting a letter, for months, to nobody. Unlike the accompanying work, *Stay Safe*, *Best Wishes* takes place mostly outside, on the streets.

*Best Wishes* essentially embarks from where *Stay Safe* ended, as its solitary subject concluded what appeared to be their weekend lockdown by strapping on their mask and exiting their apartment. *Best Wishes* is a prequel, in terms of the chronology of its making, but appears more like the latter work's sequel, as its mood of philosophical rumination is akin, and included the same collaborative teams, notably led by Nora Tataryan for the texts of the voiceover narrations, and Emre Başaran as director of photography. In both videos, there is a repeated act of hand-washing, turning keys, typing, such mundane but all-defining behaviors.

There are a few uncanny bridges between the videos, *Best Wishes* and *Stay Safe*, the first of which could be said to be in the connotations of their titles. They are equally named with a kind of satirical bent. The rote signing off of emails, for instance, with "best wishes," directly translated into Turkish as well, brings to mind the humdrum office hours of freelance and cultural workers whose communication styles might sometimes feel as weighed by the monotonous rhythms of empty bureaucracy as the weariest of Orwellian ministries. Likewise, *Stay Safe*, being the catch-all phrase for pandemic survival, carries an unspoken heaviness.

In their narration text for *Stay Safe*, Tataryan and Aslan wrote: "What I actually find hard is that we are abandoned to our fate. For we've been robbed of the right to feel worried as well. I'm not nervous but angry." The character, a man ostensibly living alone, showers before making a salad. He thinks about the letter they had written earlier, addressing, as it were, nobody in particular, in continuity with *Best Wishes*, in which the nuanced, writerly text of Tataryan and Aslan narrates: "I wanted to tell you about my state of mind, as well as I can. Recently, a lot has changed but it's also as if nothing has changed."

October 5, 1:00 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Textural

There is a small room on the ground floor of Kale Design and Art Center (KTSM ) along the busy, main drag in Istanbul's Karaköy quarter, where wheezing industrial trucks heave as honking taxis snake through the workaday commuter traffic of the city's European core. Inside, a series of thin spotlights focus on a variety of artworks hung against the wall or suspended from the ceiling. They are, as itemized, "woven paintings," derived from a diverse assemblage of natural materials, which the artist, Asli Smith, crafted with a refined sense for balancing contrasting textures.

Paper, as a medium, has the capacity to be extremely delicate and yet very rough. It is, in that way, like skin, familiar to the human body. Its absorption of color, of pigment, has an uncanny similarity to flesh, and all the more so in the able hands of Smith, whose artworks are corporeal in their vital connection to ecological source, to earthly, living matter. One perfectly striking work by Smith is entitled, *The Sky and All the Colors 01* (2021). It approaches an abstract watercolor aesthetic, as its natural inks soaked into the cotton paper.

Gleaned from indigo, red cabbage, avocado pits and safflower, the organic inks that Smith used to make, *The Sky and All the Colors 01* rounds out a chorus of color harmonies that is, also dissonant, like the blemishes of evolutionary mutation that spawn biodiverse flora. And leaving its hems unwoven, the unfinished quality of the piece preserves its inherent, stylistic consistency owing to the greater concert of worldly imperfection out of which its individuation was conceived. As a microcosmic metaphor for the embodiment of nature, each single work is an imagined ecology, unique in its color profile and, most importantly, its textures, as the evolutionary principle of touch might be said to be the most primal. While visual, Smith's works might be appreciated most intimately as evocations of that primary sensation, perceivable in the context of solar sensation, as of skin to paper. Yet, while it is not advised to actually reach out to graze Smith's artworks, their palpability is as visible as the warming light of the sun.

Part of the intent of Smith, in creating her works, is to consider the possibility that sensual experience alone, that is, a confrontation with empirical reality, has the power to cultivate new connections between the synapses of human behavior with that of the environment as a whole, which, until very recently with the identification of the current era as Anthropocene, was moving along a course quite alternative to that of its predominant species. Smith's art might pose the idea that there are traces of that differentiation still alive everywhere.

The key locus of that perspective is rooted in the sun, which serves as the overarching motif of the exhibition, *Solar: Of the Sun*. The Earth's star is responsible not only for the emergence of life itself, but also for the range of colors that arise from material by way of light and its perception. Smith's works, in turn, are integuments of rearranged surfaces as they have been infused with solar energy. Entirely abstract, but for a few impressionistic semblances, their forms do yet evoke naturalistic landscapes, faded visages, cloud-like visions.



At the same time, for all of its tree-hugging passion, its exuberant introspection into the terrestrial nuances of shape and shade, the woven painting craft at the center of *Solar* has an almost digital reminiscence. By weaving strips of paper into frayed rectangles, Smith reveals a cubistic grouping of squares, sequenced dualistically, like the zero and one of computation. Looking closely at such pieces as *The Sky and All the Colors 01*, for example, it is clear that Smith crafted this effect with conscious precision, adapting rudimentary geometries.

The many and multifaceted elements of each and every work by Smith have ample space to breath, exposed by her willingness to allow people to see something of her process. *The Sky and All the Colors 01* is completely unwoven along its top, and below shreds of paper dangle. It gives the piece an unaffected air, as if it were found after having long lain out under the sun, enjoying the diversification of its surface hue by virtue of its vulnerability to the hot brilliant light that pours down from the sky, commingling through it with the darkness of the soil to create the spectrums of color that radiate, alive, to expose the stories of their being.

Smith employs certain techniques to emulate the course of nature, as she boils and steams plants, food waste, earth and stones, emphasizing the phenomenon of transformation as utterly innate to living, even if that notion might seem strange in a society that increasingly identifies with the mechanics of virtual representation. After an unprecedented bout of domestic internal displacement in which countless people have been forced to migrate indoors, exhibiting the transformative potential of the sun as the origin of coloration, of art and sight, imagination and creativity, Smith's artwork has simple, but powerful and critical implications. That said, high-minded ideals aside, there is subdued minimalism to Smith's work, which is easily perceivable in her piece *Solar 02*, which is the essential fixture of the exhibition as the piece was commissioned for last year's online project "Possibilities of Waste: Form and Process" for KTSM. *Solar 02* is nearly monochromatic, bearing a light brownish woody palate that brings to mind the handcrafted bamboo mats of a river loft somewhere in the Pacific.

Again, as in *The Sky and All the Colors 01*, Smith wove a diamond square, standing on its point and shot through with shafts of bright, narrow folds that appear like the sun at the center of the piece, which is comprised of squarish, rectangular weaves that alternate between tints of arboreal beige and burnt sienna. In their curatorial statement, Yonca Keremoğlu and Rana Kelleci reference the Homeric epic of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which the archetypal Penelope weaves in the shadow of the mythical olive tree around their bed. Penelope, perhaps like the artistry of Smith, assumes the role of Earth, as they share a grounded, active state of creative coping in the face of climate catastrophe and the obscurities of worldwide ignorance as its warning overwhelms often multiple natural disasters at a time. She awaits the return of Odysseus, who, like the sun, is sometimes obscured from the ground looking up. By her weaving, she might bring him back.

October 13, 12:22 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Brutalist

To encapsulate an artist's works within a particular aesthetic or ideological movement is itself anachronistic. The prevailing, postmodern cultural milieu is home to a complex diversity of fresh, curatorial insights into the placement of artworks within specific theoretical and institutional contexts. That said, the bold dedication that sculptor Burcu Erden demonstrates to the distinctiveness of her oeuvre is especially stimulating where conceptualism meets craft, as the resonances of prehistoric creativity merged into references to ancient classicism.

Erden's most recent pieces break from the mold of her past exhibition at Art On in 2019, *Calling for the Mass*. At that time, her studio was somewhere within the snaking alleys of Istanbul's old district of Fatih, by the Golden Horn inlet. She fit right in with street mechanics and working-class sorts as she erected muscular, wooden sculptures out of wood, lining their contours with black lines that looked like burn marks. Her current show, *Seal*, might be said to have a more feminine expression.

The works that comprise *Seal* are, at times, softer than Erden's pieces shown during *Calling for the Mass*. They bear a sense of courage, as they're less direct, more complicated, yet simpler, illusory and practical. In that way, their unfinished, exploratory character approaches a conceptual frame closer to that of contemporary curation in the global art world. Erden is a local artist who seems to be situating her works more deeply within the soil of Turkey, literally diversifying her medium from wood to ceramics.

She has also leapt from arboreal to mineral shapes. Her series of polyester sculptures, as shown at *Seal*, assume the form of mountain crags, and they are less anthropomorphic than her similarly conceived pieces, which she produced by splitting and carving wood. She is returning, it appears, on her creative path, to the womb of form, as it emerges out of earthly material, and in the hand of the artist, comes to express an idea. While theoreticians might aptly categorize her art as primitivist, her work bears certain, if subtler, intricacies.

There are three basic designs that the artworks of *Seal* might fall under. A series of ceramic reliefs are accompanied by comparative engravings into cylindrical stones that are loosely reminiscent of statues found in Mongolia bearing the indigenous Turkic script called the Orkhon inscriptions. But the cultures who used cylindrical stone seals span the breadth of Egyptian and Hindu civilization, as well as Mesopotamia, part of which is situated within the present national boundaries of Turkey. The polyester sculptures that resemble stratified, sedimentary rock.

Erden's polyester pieces look like they were mined from a Paleolithic cave. One piece, untitled and dated to 2021, has the semblances of a bear, an uncanny reflection of the subconscious bonds that may have compelled her creativity to enter that critical domain known as the primitive. *Seal* has proven that Erden is unafraid to embark on a more explicit path toward the earliest of formal styles.

It is relevant to note that Erden's exploration of form is essentially about the contrast between the concave and the convex, a matter of space and its negative, which brings to mind painting in caves, working with its curves, or building ziggurats and other step pyramids on the vast, flat plains of the first cities. *Seal* is an exercise in the historical practice of effecting the mutual balance between concavity and convexity, as she stamped the crannies and grooves of her cylindrical seals onto wet clay, and fired the rising impressions.

In her rudimentary dualism, Erden edged anthropomorphic traces into the black, gray and red stone of her cylindrical seals, and rolled them over the malleable clay repeatedly. Despite the gains of early twentieth century artists who innovated aesthetic perspective, changing the formality of art toward greater individual freedom, modernism could be defined as an act of industrial repetition, a truth most famously upheld by Andy Warhol, but which Walter Benjamin prophesied in his essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production* (1935).

Approximating Benjamin's erudition, essayist Ibrahim Cansızoğlu wrote a brilliant catalog piece itemizing the scholarly context surrounding the works of Erden over the course of her career, which, despite having only just begun is proving to be promising. Cansızoğlu discusses Erden's research at the Museum of the Ancient Orient, a part of the group of Istanbul Archaeology Museums in Istanbul, as its archaeological artifacts served to inspire her creative turn from focusing on sculptures to generating a series of reliefs that further develop her conceptual arc.

Cansızoğlu carried his argument by speaking to important moments in art history with respect to a theoretical understanding of Erden's work. He began by reaching back to a show at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) that opened in 1984, titled *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, and its subsequent bashing by America's top critics who saw in its curation a weakness for the wrongs of colonialist oppression, namely overshadowing the individuality and authorship of non-Western artists and their societies.

Erden, however, is not appropriating the cultural work of societies whose cultures and civilizations preceded that of modern Turkey – unlike Pablo Picasso's neo-African Cubism, or Paul Gauguin's objectification of Pacific Island women – but instead, her pieces intervene into the sources of technological ingenuity, toward an excavation of practical ideas that might stimulate her practice. Cansızoğlu wrote it sharply, that she is “abstracting the morphology of the living,” and that with *Seal* she ventured to encompass the sculptural potentials of geomorphology.

The allure of *Seal*, in the context of Art On as a curatorial space, and considering the progression of Erden's works, is that she has taken a braver direction in terms of speaking to the relationship between salability and criticality in Istanbul's art world, a rift that divides its institutions and workers like none other. Whereas before she could be said to have crafted aesthetically riveting, almost readymade sculptures, she is now tackling the notion of art as repetitive imperfection.

Erden has leaned into the problems of objectivity and originality by focusing on process over product. And as an artist, she is making her mark in that process. “The presence of the original is

the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity,” wrote Benjamin, who went on to propound on the nature of forgery, which was more artistic when it was more technical, exemplified by photography, whereas it was less so when handmade. Erden, then, in her art, reaching back to premodern techniques, touches on themes in her own way, as special and unique as the etchings that she sculpts and engraves like the unrelenting force of gravity.

October 19, 4:57 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Off-Site

If an equivalent of ambient music existed in visual art it might be conceptualism, as harmony and melody, rhythm and composition are reduced to sound, its textures, as a postmodern meta-reflection on the mediums through which it is recorded. It is a cathartic tonic in a cultural age defined by overproduction. Artists are there to lean into the sharp edges where trend and tradition meet to form creative work that might be encompassed within a frame of contemporaneity.

In an art world defined by a kind of capitalist tribalism, individualistic in the extreme and anxiously exclusive, vainglorious of its elite abstraction from the pragmatics of the profane, everyday economic realities that most people face for the better part of their lives, the idea of collaboration between galleries is a momentous cause for celebration. Öktem Aykut enjoys a special enlightenment in cahoots with Dirimart as the kindred aesthetic ideology of its artists, Sinan Logie and Güçlü Öztekin, interfuse to abandon.

While the act of collaborating entails a form of codependence, it also has the potential to transform the identities of its actors on all sides, as their exchanges reflect an alternative vision of a mutually reimagined future. Blooming outward from the white cubes of Beyoğlu, where the core of Istanbul's art establishment waters its roots, Aykut and Dirimart have transplanted their seeds to the hard, rocky soil of Fatih, the ancient district that has always been culturally distinct from its neighboring environs across the Golden Horn.

Logie and Öztekin are two artists peerlessly equipped to assume the task of sociological immersion, as their works follow an institutional deep dive into the netherworld of contemporary Turkish culture. On four floors, their curious, eerie and challenging works grace the off-site ambiance of Barın Han like a dissonance that, in its consistency, is listenable and even enjoyable. Textless and curated at a remove from the normative didacticism and intellectual academicism that rules Istanbul's art scene, their show comes as a sweet relief.

Barın Han advertised the two-man exhibition, *Sky is attached / Say sound, we meet*, with the image of a shadow showing two silhouettes standing above a single leg stepping onto bare concrete. The tone of the photograph is clear, an embodiment of the principle that conceptuality is not the antithesis of imagistic visualization. In fact, the show itself is made up of figurative forms that, through sculpture, installation, variously painted and dyed papers and other two-dimensional materials, step forward from the introspections of their daytime reveries.

Before the first floor of artworks on display, the title of the show is scrawled onto the surface of a metal service door, painted over its rough, plain white stain common among industrial office buildings in Fatih, a behemoth municipality that holds untold choruses of bewildered tourists and working-class locals. And around its corner, a black canvas blocks the natural light from leaking through as fans whirl, animating the floor covered in little styrofoam packaging balls. Across the airy sea fizz is a rustic sculpture resembling a dog on a block.

Somehow, the atmosphere of the opening installation at *Sky is attached / Say sound, we meet* is endearing, enough to redeem a far-flung excursion over the endless mountains of greasy restaurants and claustrophobic storefronts spilling out with the wares of textile traders and knickknack hawkers. It affects a welcome spaciousness, despite the decidedly unglamorous resonance of the place, as its miniature focal point throws into relief the unsightly disrepair of its walls and windows with the playful gesture of an artist.

From there, the rooms and halls of Barın Han are decorated with strange colorations, abnormal shapes and an overall grungy sensibility that is as rare as it is missed from the professional, mercantilist gallery world of Istanbul. *Sky is attached / Say sound, we meet* is not only an artist's art show but one of the best kept secrets of the post-lockdown era return to social life within the local art scene for those special sorts who get their kicks following the latest inventions of freethinking technicians and wakeful dreamers.

There is a refreshing informality to *Sky is attached / Say sound, we meet* in that none of the works are titled or attributed as they are exhibited within the space. The significance of off-site in general has certain connotations that should be aired within the dynamic multiplicity of institutional organization within the arts and culture field. For example, when the spaceless curatorial platform Protocinema came to Fatih with an installation by Mike Nelson in 2019 there was an almost orientalist tone to its foreign gaze.

The humility of the local is present and bold in its sense of direction as led by Dirimart and Aykut at quite a similar “han” to that of the modern, worker’s factory of Gürün Han that Protocinema inhabited. Unlike the historic, medieval airs of the “han,” or caravanserai that other cultural organizations have shown work in, such as BLOK art space at Büyük Valide Han in 2017, the crude and basic mundane conditions of working in Barın Han is all the more accentuated by its abandonment and transformation into a collaborative off-site gallery.

Logie and Öztekin, by their prolific industry and technical focus, have brought a proud slew of artworks that dialogue well with the uncanny, substandard interior. There is an installation that includes a separated wall, its brickwork lain bare behind cracked white paint. Against its chipped, imperfect, unfinished lines, framed pieces of art hang, animating the mood with striking hues of bright light yellow surrounding a core of cubist blots. A related series uses the same shocking color, halved around perfect black circles.

With an erudite glance, it is, at times, obvious to see where the art of Öztekin appears beside that of Logie. Öztekin can be identified by canvases that are loosely suspended and reveal stretch marks. His semi-figurative forms are ghostly, haunting with an impressionistic bent flooded by pitch darkness, blur and shade, a spectrum buried in a dim and cavernous inner world. Logie has a printmaker’s hand, as his often well-framed pieces play with the cold logic of paper production in confrontation with abstract art and the aesthetics of intellectual utilitarianism. At times, so does Öztekin.

The works of these two unique and aesthetically-introverted Istanbul-based artists are congruous with each other, yet at the same time, wholly independent from the realism of the world. And while set against the hard light of Barın Han, *Sky is attached / Say sound, we meet* is a paean to the afterlife of modernism in a Western country with a non-Western history that knows it can let its hair down and does not feel forced to adhere to a global cultural moment that is on the edge of reason and is inclined to free fall.

October 29, 2:44 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Sensibility

In Sanskrit, the liturgical language of the ancient Hindu civilization, there is a saying that might be mistaken for an expression of nihilism but is in fact a conceptual affirmation of life in all of its psychologically complex wonders: “neti, neti,” which translates to “not this, not that.” It can be understood as a form of mental yoga, which, by continually negating every imaginable definition of reality, its parts and its whole, the seer comes to an enlightened state of meditation, touching the ground of being while gazing upward, one with the endless azure.

The solo exhibition, *I am Neither on the Earth Nor in the Sky* comprises seven years of work by Ramazan Can, as shown across two floors at Anna Laudel Gallery’s new gallery space close to Istanbul’s Taksim Square. Its underlying theme is reminiscent of the Sufi wisdom phrase, that a human soul is “in this world but not of it.” Can captured and transformed the ideas of settlement and migration with his distinctive visual vocabulary. The curation begins with his ventures reanimating the floor rug, known as a *kilim*, with concrete and neon in various manifestations. There is an old Turkic tradition, going back to the steppe nomads of the Gobi Desert, that says a house is not a home until it is covered with a carpet. There is a mystical beauty to the symbolism of separating the cold earth from the warmth of a home, even if that divide is enacted with a thin layer of felt, also characteristic of the customary slippers called *terlik* that are offered to guests at the front door of most Turkish residences. There is a special etymology to a Turkish synonym for home, *yuva*, which translates directly to nest.

The running metaphor of Can’s latest exhibition grapples with the harmonious and also dissonant contradictions of earthly habitation as a balance of movement and its opposite, as defined by the occupation and possession of territorial space. Interestingly, back to language, the Turkish word for living somewhere translates to “sitting,” but it can be interchanged with “experiencing.” Can juxtaposes the raw materials of homemaking as an apt, visual comment on life in Istanbul, critiquing its daily chorus of ecological metamorphosis, just to be able to sit.

There is another curious habit conventional to Turkish domestic decor in which a carpet or rug is hung against a wall, suspended like the overarching motif of the show *I am Neither on the Earth Nor in the Sky*. Its effect upends the grounding of the functional ornamentation into a figment of pure beatification, an embellishment that might retain a pragmatism by allowing the dust of its surface to air out. In that way, Can created the title piece of his new exhibition in which he’d cut out a carpet to form its letters. Akin to the sliced carpets of Şakir Gökçebağ, the imagistic thread of Can Sayınlı or the neon-illuminated, historically informed works of Sarkis Zabunyan, the art of Ramazan Can enjoys creative interpretation within the circle of Turkey’s contemporary artists whose works dialogue with aspects of their national cultural heritage. To open *I am Neither on the Earth Nor in the Sky*, the installation-based, sculptural works are shown according to their material affinity about the basement-like white cube of Anna Laudel Gallery.

Can’s work *The Pain of Existence* (2021) is made of a piecemeal pattern of concrete covered neatly with sheets of rug, thinly outlined over its connecting segments like legos affixed together.



The cognitive cacophony that it instills parallels the imposition of hard logic onto the flowing, waving landscape of Istanbul's shorefront urban sprawl that rolls outward from either side of the Bosphorus with growth spurts of high-rise architecture. The vast sweep of Anatolian communities that inhabit Istanbul cling to its bare, artificial stone like Can's rugs. The geometrically aligned fragmentation of a rectangular rug into construction bricks breaks up its familiar arrangements of floral imagery. Can has redesigned the ubiquitous *kilim* into a mere image, lifeless and abstract except for its visibility as the semblance of homeliness reduced to a mode of sheer practicality. An adjacent piece titled, *To Feel at Home X* (2021) halves a classic *kilim* into its neon likeness. The shock is that of displacing home, negating its grounded conviction, like "neti, neti," but as a contemporary art practice.

When the contemporary draftsman Yuşa Yalçıntaş changed his rulebook, inverting the boundaries within which he would draw his spectacularly intricate, Escher-like scenes of children in uniform invested in visually-striking games and puzzles, he created a piece called *House Kite* (2021). Its centerpiece is a dwelling that seems to be in the sky, yet the background is optically illusive. Moreover, the front door is itself a *kilim* and the roof and walls of the house are magically both inside and outside. *House Kite* emerges from the depths of the collective Turkish subconscious shared with that of Ramazan Can and others. His latest solo exhibition, *I am Neither on the Earth Nor in the Sky* is a nod to the personal truth that a person is more than the social prescriptions of their respective cultural identity, that homes are made out of the thin air of histories in which people moved and settled in repetitive successions, whether according to seasonal or international change.

And the artist rises to the occasion of Western art history to tackle an alternate vision of its legacy, transcending the weight of Turkish issues along the lines of urban construction and changing traditions, to speak to the importance of cultural appropriation and pop culture in the mammoth and pervasive visual art field. It is no secret that art in the West has come to gain a certain unrivaled prestige as a result of the colonial-era acquisition of cultural artifacts. It is a perennial consideration for European and American museologists. But in the hands of Can, the second floor of Anna Laudel Gallery is filled with his prolific paintings, in which he retraces the portraiture of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Albrecht Dürer and Edouard Manet while envisioning disproportionately drawn people and places through the lens of a gritty Turkish neorealist expressionism. His oil on photograph, *I am the King II* (2021) is an irreverent revision of the famed *Mona Lisa* (1503). Yet, even surrounded by the ghosts of Westernization, his art inevitably comes full circle, back to Turkish subjects, such as in his print on fabric and lightbox, *Tapestry* (2021), evoking a bucolic Anatolian countryside in which the mythical deer of Turkish poetry is X-rayed. Finally, nature itself is inside out.

November 3, 1:00 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Architectural

The right to creativity is synonymous with the right to life. That is the crux of brut art, or its correlative movements among naive artists and freethinkers in all mediums of expression who have sought to transcend the bounds of academic, or any institutional legitimacy, thereby allowing for more inclusivity in an otherwise often elitist humanities sector. But while that can be more easily said in the schools of painting and sculpture, as just two examples, the realm of architecture as a highly practical and applied art, is subject to a range of different scrutinies.

That did not stop the radical Austrian activist-artist Friedenreich Hundertwasser from proclaiming that amateur, experimental and alternative-minded creatives had every right to be architects, that is, to fulfill the needs of building and its various divisions, be it urban housing or theatrical acoustics. In 1958 Hundertwasser wrote *Mould Manifesto Against Rationalism in Architecture* while leading a career in polemical art. His biomorphic tendencies can be likened to Antoni Gaudi, or the American “garbage warrior” Michael Reynolds.

Hundertwasser would go on to such artistic activities as professing a return to constitutional monarchy in Austria under Otto von Habsburg and redesigning a Maori-Inspired New Zealand flag among untold other performance-like turns of ideological invention that drew from European graphic art history and the global environmental movement. Since his passing in 2000, his memory is revitalized in Istanbul with the work of curator Murat Tabanlıoğlu, whose show for the 39th Contemporary Artists Prize Exhibition at Akbank Sanat references him.

Tabanlıoğlu is a keen urban thinker whose curation extends into city planning with fresh and perennial wisdom. The idea, gleaned from the likes of Hundertwasser, that runs through his group show at Akbank Sanat, is to instill the value of building one’s home, not out in the boondocks of country wilderness, as is common to the back-to-land mythos of the midcentury American suburbanite, but right in the middle of the metropolitan chaos, perhaps even as an antidote to its runaway construction.

The problem is that architecture is codified and limited to an exclusive order of professional workers, who, in many ways rightly so, are tasked with building the arranged networks of apartment complexes and high-rises that shape life in Istanbul, from the interiority of domestic psychology to the soundscape of its rough-and-tumble streets. Tabanlıoğlu, however, chose to focus on a single architectural feature, namely a balcony, which is iconic to Istanbul’s residential nexus. Some twenty-one young artists responded, their eyes on the future.

A metal sculpture by Gaziantep-born Şükrü Aslan opens the exhibition with a figure composed of strips, almost threaded. They are holding onto the bars of their balcony, dangling their legs off of its edge. The pedestal of the piece is intact, so as to give a sense of height to its groundless dimensionality. And Aslan also extended the top bar of the black iron balcony over the head of the metallic person. It is a very different image than that of Italy singing from its balcony to keep lockdown depression at bay. Aslan’s vision digs into the fixed matter of solitude.

From there, the thematized assemblage of artworks continues on with a quartet of photographs by Ayşe Gözde Çöklü. Born in 1981, and originally from the town of Bandırma of Balıkesir province on the southern coast of the Sea of Marmara, Çöklü's images adapt the concept of the balcony as a space that is both inside and outside of a home, a nexus not unlike that of a resident foreigner who is simultaneously an outsider where they're from and where they live. In each of Çöklü's photographs aspects of interiority, like outlets, commingle with parking lots.

An interesting spin on Aslan's piece can be found in the utterly minimalistic, even slightly brutalist piece by Aslihan Uruş called *Space* (2021). Like Çöklü, Uruş graduated from Hacettepe University's painting department in the capital city of Ankara, where many of Turkey's finest artists received their alma mater, including Frankfurt-based Mustafa Kunt and Özlem Günyol. Although itemized as an installation, *Space* is quite consolidated into a single piece. Its rustic simplicity is almost tacky, but it is effective communicating grunge.

Beside it is a veritable installation, albeit an easy one, by artist duo Egemen Tuncer and Hacer Kıroğlu, whose piece, *Balcony.rar* (2021) includes a wooden folding table and two chairs only the outdoor balcony furniture, is something of an expression of the ".rar" extension, a digital reality that in the hands of the artists, indicates compression. Even the book that they placed on the surface of the table is unusually slim. The title, *Ornament and Crime*, is a collection of essays by Austrian architect Adolph Loos, whose ideas Hundertwasser rejected.

If Loos was a modernist architect, Hundertwasser was a postmodernist who sought to transcend the purely utilitarian ambitions of his predecessors in favor of a more contiguous, organic style of living in concert with the ecological surroundings in which a community lives. "Nature is studied – but without success," wrote Loos, in his 1897 essay, *Our School of Applied Art*, one of the writings in *Ornament and Crime*. When it came to reinventing architectural creativity, Hundertwasser fought against the anthropocentric focus of Loos.

The 39th Contemporary Artists Prize Exhibition at Akbank Sanat covers two floors of the sleek building near the end of Istiklal Avenue where the bustling promenade abuts the spacious revitalization of Taksim Square. But whether or not its chosen artworks convey a collaborative point with respect to its underlying conceptual motifs is unclear. It appears that instead of prompting the young artists of Turkey to experiment with the application of designs proposed by Loos, Hundertwasser or others, they have shown themselves to be clever, but removed observers before the incessant housing and construction issues that have plagued Western and global society since the dawn of modernity.

A fine art print of a digital photograph by Emin Berk, who studied in the department of photography at the prestigious Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University is titled, *Out'side* (2021) and shows a dog by the gate of an unpeopled house. Behind it are the stacks of industrial plants, and a relatively treeless landscape that unfolds, all too familiarly. Both Loos and Hundertwasser, although disagreeing on the effect of their proposals, intended for artists to get their hands dirty,

reenter the workshop and seek communion with the source of their materials and the places in which they worked. But as in Ismail Onur Gönüllü's installation, *Scream, Things of Shadows* (2015-2011), what we see at Akbank Sanat are mere reconfigurations of perspectives from externalities that, curiously, also seem to have emerged from within, not unlike a balcony.

November 9, 3:40 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Times

Leading into one of the lower exhibition halls within the elegant ambiance of Istanbul's Sakıp Sabancı Museum is a series of photographs by Murat Germeç. The color scheme of the installation begins with crystal clear, full-color panoramas of the Thracian valleys and Anatolian hills linked by wide suspension bridges over the Bosphorus. The images maintain a peculiar focus on the shapeshifting earth below. They then come to include grayscale works, almost sepia-toned, interiors of condemned, ruined and abandoned buildings that might have once housed the industrious kitchens and workshops of the city's illustrious heritage.

Not only is the contrast stark, but it seems to merge. As if, by a succession of stills, Germeç succeeded in capturing a sense of the overwhelming momentum of territorial change that enshrouds and eventually swallows the unseen spaces amid the runaway urbanization that has come to define life in the largest Turkish metropolis. The sleek photographic aesthetic of ultramodern roadways encircling marinas along the Sea of Marmara, or of a highway passing through the shadow of towering, half-constructed high-rise complexes is then juxtaposed with silvery spectacles of aged storefronts and apartments with their iconic medieval bay windows.

As the Izmir-born ancient philosopher Heraclitus famously chimed, "No man ever steps in the same river twice," and so, his disciple, an Athenian who crossed the Aegean Sea to learn from him, rebutted that no one can ever even step into the same river once. When applied to the passage of time and the idea that is Istanbul, a geography, a community, a body politic, Asia Minor's wizened philosophical fragments come to enjoy a revival of meaning. It is in that spirit that Germeç curated *Past Present Istanbul*, assembling multidisciplinary works by artist alumni from Sakıp Sabancı University's Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design program.

Despite the relatively dull, generalized title, which might be seen in a nondescript municipal exhibition on the outskirts of Fatih, Germeç proved to bring together a vital and radical group whose artwork coalesces broadly and diversely within the social networks of Istanbul's young culture scene. Such large-scale works as *Istanbul: A Familiar Crowd* by Korhan Karaoysal are fit for the sizable museum show, and gleam with the faces of people who seem to have graced the overlapping sectors of media and art. Adorned in casual attire, and with flat expressions, cafe society looks back at its keen onlookers, equally curious.

One of the more impressively unique, and visually stunning installations at Germeç's *Past Present Istanbul* was a historically innovative piece by Ege Kanar, entitled, *Vessel*, exploring the Armenian-led craft of cymbal-making. Kanar researched back to the Bronze Age, and mined the Ottoman archives for evidence of the migrant Zildjian family and the traces of their early work as it exists between Turkey and America. The vibrating soundscape of these masterworks of metal manufacture hang from the ceiling of Sakıp Sabancı Museum and echo with the haunting story of their resonance.

The well-curated surrounding *Vessel* is a photo series opposite that of Karaoyosal's piece by the imagistic artist and photobook publisher Cemre Yeşil Gönenli, whose subjects are purposefully cropped, headless and bound by the hands. In place of their heads are lamps that evoke the cityscape during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. They are selections from her book, *Dream & Fact: A Handbook of Forgiveness and A Handbook of Punishment* (2020). Comparatively, with Kanar, Gönenli dove headlong into Ottoman history, excavating the albums of Sultan Abdülhamid II, whose love for photography was only matched by his enthusiasm for English detective novels.

It is rumored that Sultan Abdülhamid II was burying his nose in a Sherlock Holmes tale while revolutionaries were banging on his door at Yıldız Palace, an apt metaphor for the twilight of the Ottomans. Gönenli, in turn, has blown the dust off of archival photographs taken during his rule. A kind of metaphysical waywardness runs through Germeň's curation, a sort of sideways inkling that Istanbul may not be on course as the Westernizing world again shifts out of control as it had especially during the first half of the twentieth century, as, arguably, always.

A deceptively simple duo of paintings by Ahu Akgün expresses as much, in reference to what might have been, to some, an utterly predictable event, and to others a total surprise, namely the Vitaspirit accident of April 7, 2018, when a 225-meter-long (738-foot) carrier ship drifted off course on the Bosphorus and crashed into the Hekimbaşı Salih Efendi Mansion. Akgün painted the bow of the ship as it would have been seen from the mansion itself, an imposing, approaching mass. In turn, the mansion is a vulnerable structure of hollow sticks, although architecturally exquisite, it is, as Istanbul's past, delicately up against unstoppable industry.

Within the transforming landscape of Istanbul's infrastructure are ever-looming shadows of impending construction, a ubiquitous feeling shared by all, even if unspoken, that the ideals of modernity, its conveniences and glamor, await, just around the corner, practically messianic in its omnipresent import. Using wall plaster with uncoated poster paper in the manner of a photographic collage, Örsan Karkuş focused on Haydarpaşa Railway Station, placing archival images of the transportation's center's history alongside that of contemporary snapshots, representing the famed nexus that once served Parisian travelers on the Orient Express.

Among the renovations at Haydarpaşa there is rumored to be a climate change center, merging cultural work with ecological activism, much in the spirit that the newly opened Gazhane Museum is demonstrating for its well-educated and internationalist millennial crowds. The work of Karkuş is quite akin to the aesthetic formulae of Germeň's installation, and it might branch out in relation to a sculptural collage by Nora Byrne, whose piece, *Now you can cross without touching* is an assemblage of Istanbul's spectacular bridges made of cardboard and found objects.

*Past Present Istanbul* is curated with a careful sensitivity to the spatial interrelation between mediums, where photographic works align and commingle with aural atmospheres, and where sculptural pieces meld into video-based installations. While there are dark, apocalyptic sensibilities in Begüm Yamanlar's archival pigment prints, *When the Bosphorus Dries Up*, they

are presented in proximity to a post-Anthropocene environmental revitalization in the work of Deniz Ezgi Sürek. In the form of a digital print, and wallpaper, Sürek's piece, *Memento Mori* is a solemn reminder to Istanbul's untold city-dwellers that time will fly even in the face of reality's truths, hard as concrete, but no less subject to elementary change.

November 16, 3:03 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Labor

The Renaissance is equated not only with an apex in the production and appreciation of fine art, but a wholesale overhaul in the relationship between cultural workers and their patrons. While still fastened to the hip of the religious establishment, painters and sculptors had gained a foothold toward rightful attribution, intellectual property so to speak, their names enshrined not only within places of worship, but within the secular canons of creativity in the realms of Western Christendom.

But as the northerly Protestant ethic overtook its more balmy sibling of Catholicism in the European south, the meaning of work, and of the cultural zeitgeist overall shifted, leading to the industrial capitalism that has come to define the present, with its stinging urbanization and burdensome sense of duty to the assembly lines of status quo manufacture. It is visible in art, where the decadent glory of Biblical epics lathered across the walls of such examples as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel were supplanted by a grimmer trend, at once more earthy.

Before the emerging Turkish artist Can Yıldırım ever thought of preparing the many and diverse multimedia works of his first solo show, *Don't Worry We're Side By Side There Are No Giants, Nor Their Shoulders* at Istanbul's artist-run space IMÇ 5533 directed by Can Küçük, he was attending classes at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore. He never forgot the moment he saw the *Dance of Death* woodblock prints by German painter and printmaker Hans Holbein, who lived for some forty-five years in the macabre early sixteenth century.

It was especially Holbein's print *Adam Tills the Soil* that captured Yıldırım's eccentric, postmodern imagination. His exhibition at IMÇ 5533 centers around a series of laser-etched, transparent engravings that he screwed onto rectangles of utility wood. The effect is like that of entering the workshop of a framer experimenting within the borders of their craft so as to better understand the interrelated, yet contrasting phenomena of invisibility and clarity. His quotations of Holbein's engravings are oblique, but also sensitive and searching.

Holbein, like Yıldırım's installation within the working-class environs of IMÇ 5533, reflected on labor as the stuff of life between birth and death. Before entering the bare floor of the storefront workshop block 5533 in the ancient mall surrounded by the vicious circles of runaway citification in the heart of Istanbul's Fatih district, the window glass out front is embossed with a statement drawn from Yıldırım's interactions with a talented calligrapher working close by. Loosely translated from Turkish, it reads, "Living is harder than dying."

Down the hall toward the back of the spare, almost bleak space that is IMÇ 5533, conjuring a nightmarish underground factory-like ambiance, the glassy laser-etched works of referential engraving lead to a short, handheld video. Taken while Yıldırım participated in an artist residency at the westernmost point in Turkey, at a place called Babakale near the Dardanelles strait, the central image is that of an egg on a dirt road. While, at first glance, baffling, the piece is utterly personal, and draws from the artist's childhood.



As a dependent preschooler, Yıldırım would look up to his housemaid as she told him frightful folktales out of the depths of her superstitious fantasies. She believed that the world would one day be flattened to the extent that someone could see an egg across a perfectly horizontal plane from end to end of the planet. That egg, vulnerable, and representative of ontological completion, is shot from a distance as Yıldırım's lens zooms in, capturing it at the end of a tire-worn path.

The subtle distinction between the physical immediacy of pain and the existential state of suffering lingers in the thick air like the irony of death's ubiquity, eternal and omnipresent, overshadowing daily life with the laughter of a medieval daemon. There is a diagonal line that can be made from across the room-wide installation of Yıldırım's work at IMÇ 5533 pointing to the three stages of existence, i.e. birth, life and death. In the opposite corner of the forty-two-second video titled, *Egg* is a piece of plexiglass lightbox and foil, *Not*.

The surface of *Not* features the Turkish word of the title, written in seriffed font over a grid of squares. The artificiality of rigid lines is often set against the flowing forms of artwork, both figurative and abstract, like language. Within the variety of clever juxtapositions, Yıldırım is placing a hard accent on the idea that while the duality of life and death is apparently concrete, its manifestations are subject to innumerable deviations. While rejecting absolute interpretation with respect to art history, at the heart of the show is a philosophically rich, astute praxis.

In the middle of *Egg* and *Not* is a curious sculptural work that ascends awkwardly from the floor after a design in collaboration with Küçük, reminiscent of his own work, *Both* (2015), for which he had slightly deconstructed the utility of a stool, off-centering one of its legs. The piece, *Grow n' grow* contrasts its nest-like interior of a polishing pad with a screw-suffused, oval-shaped plastic grow-house that itself assumes the egg form, which could be said to be exactly diametrically opposed to the physical metaphor of death.

The fact that *Grow n' grow* is spatially at the center of the exhibition suggests that Yıldırım is transforming the dark precedence of Holbein's early modernist approach to the Western mythology of human identity as synonymous with the manual laborer in the same way that IMÇ 5533 offers an alternative notion to the use of commercial or manufacturing space. With leather marking pen refills gleaned from another workshop within the business complex, Yıldırım created *Silver lining*, snaking the utilitarian materials across the ceiling.

And with special attention to the contiguity of wirings, there is an Edenic theme in reference to the Biblical focus of Holbein, most emphatically expressed through a video piece of eight-plus minutes, *Snake to snake*, showing a roadside snake eating a member of its species. At one point a trucker stops and the tires of his vehicle resemble the snake's scaly constricting skin as it wraps around its nearly identical prey, another perhaps coincidental comparison between the organic and the industrial as in his focal series that begins with *The creation*.

And as an echo of death's uncanny unpredictability, chance is integral to the works of *Don't Worry We're Side By Side There Are No Giants, Nor Their Shoulders*, such as in a multitrack iPhone video, *Tonton*, in which the artist caught his kid sister and her friends performing a creative, impromptu ritual of sea burial for a deceased jellyfish. The glow of its transparent flesh reflects the surfaces of the laser-engraved plexiglass, the sheen of the embossed aluminum sheets and the idea of the show as a chorus of visibly invisible objects that like an ungrammatical chant of medieval superstition reimagine the essence of being.

November 22, 1:45 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Francophile

The artist was born in a rustic, highland district of mountain villages at the extremity of Turkey's northeastern tip, bordering the Republic of Georgia. But her art does not hint at her origins. Her paintings are, instead, profoundly immersive expressions of her absorption into French culture, a creative inspiration that bore fruit during her early years as a fine arts student in Aix-en-Provence in southern France following her studies at Ankara's Hacettepe University.

Her uncompromising, artistic sentiments as a Francophile are clear not only in the aesthetic coloration of her figurative canvases, their lush pigments of feminine poise, all rouge and negligee, but also where the lyrics of French songs are scrawled, in her elegant cursive, around the swirling hair and lipsticked lips of the fictive women she paints almost to the scale of her petite form, and with a sympathetic emotionality that is as powerful as female presence.

At her home studio overlooking the clustering urban sprawl of Istanbul's crowded Golden Horn inlet, she plays the chanson music of Alain Bashung, his track, "Je me dore" and watches as her cat sneaks between the legs of a coffee table. The title piece of her exhibition, *Art de vivre* (2021) is from the French phrase, "the art of living." She eyes its contours, a woman in a bathrobe holding a vacuum cleaner.

Even though the centerpiece of *Art de vivre* is almost to scale when Nihal Martlı stands next to it, and her face bears an uncanny resemblance, she emphasizes that it is not her. It could be more accurate to say that it is how she feels, or more obviously, how she paints. There is a sense of solitude in the painting, of a woman alone, overwhelmed with her feelings for someone not there, confined to humdrum domesticity.

After her well-attended opening at C.A.M. Gallery along the breezy alleys of Istanbul's quaint and pleasant Çukurcuma neighborhood of antique shops and art spaces, Martlı spoke of how everyone seemed to assume that the woman in her paintings was her. But she rejected their assertions by stating that the only self-portrait was a small work of ink on paper titled, *A la derive* (2020), which, from the French, means "adrift."

*A la derive* is a faint, almost colorless painting of a ship facing the far horizon, floating on the sea much in the way that the materials soaked into the surface of its fibrous medium. It is somehow cold, aloof, its direction far-flung and elsewhere. That is almost diametrically opposed to the tone of her figures, most of whom look straight back at their viewers as if vying for their attention, desperate to be seen, even while completely isolated by their homes.

In one characteristic picture, *L'entree* (2021), the lone woman is bedecked in a long, flowing, pink dress. But she is as barefoot as Cinderella prior to slipping into her glass slippers. And she is as bound to mundane, unglamorous housework, which would have her bowing low to the ground, her natural beauty unseen. But in Martlı's empathic imagination, she is peering back at her onlooker with a gaze that is at once unsuspecting as it is rivetingly model.

The figure in *L'entree*, and her background, play tricks with the eye. It is not entirely clear by simply looking at the otherwise patent images what the cryptic symbolism might be, but with a careful examination, the lack of profane dimensionality is unmistakable. The women that Martlı paints are often floating, a state of being that the painter herself identifies with, as the ground on which they stand, or kneel, is almost wall-like, surreal, flat.

Also, whereas the painted woman in *L'entree* scrubs the floor with one arm, her other hand presses the chimerical hardwood under her feet, but it is not really connected, proportionally, to her upper arm. What appears to be a purposeful mistake is not easy to detect against the very realist evocations of human form. And that's the way she had created the work in her studio, which, while unfinished, had lent itself to the illusory nature of perception.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so is perfection. And there is nothing that captures the imagination of a perfectionist quite like beholding that which is seen, in their eyes, to be beautiful. Throughout the paintings of Martlı there is a motif of cleaning, body and home. The act of purifying is often synonymous with beauty, as well. Martlı's art can be understood as a comment on the antiquated, while still enshrined, idea of cleaning as women's work.

Interestingly, the woman of *L'entree* is washing away a space within the painting where a phrase is written in red. It is apparently from a Portuguese grandmother's proverb, which says that love requires more yeast than flour. Martlı painted it in a lipstick hue in the Portuguese language, conjuring her dedication to the passionate traditional wisdom of Europe's Romance cultures.

Even if Martlı is basking in the rich hues and wild strokes of French modernism, she has a kinship with women artists, painters among them who brushed shoulders with its alluring, intellectual abstractions from working-class norms but decided to go their own way, a chief example being that of Frida Kahlo. Her piece, *Salle de Bain* (2020) is reminiscent of Kahlo's 1938 oil painting, *What the Water Gave Me*.

The visual vocabularies of *Salle de Bain* and *What the Water Gave Me* intersect where the artists' collective subconsciouses emerge out of the bathwater in which they soak. The only difference is that *Salle de Bain* is painted as if someone were spying on the bather, while *What the Water Gave Me* is from the bather's perspective. Yet, the artists played with the transparency of water as a vessel for personal memories and mysterious visions.

*Salle de Bain* shows a woman submerged, her hand held off the edge of the tile tub. Her expression is ghastly, however, and is a direct reference to the classic French painting from 1793, *The Death of Marat* by Jaques Louis David. Her body is transformed by the water, into the Bosphorus, a marine landscape that inspires as it entraps the artist in her homebound world. There is a ghostly quality to her referential piece, a mortal whisper in the dark of loneliness.

As a slight departure from the usual fare of modernist oil paintings and their affair with Francophile nostalgia, *Salle a manger* (2021) is a mixed technique work that can be said to borrow elements from the postmodernist tradition advanced by American proto-pop painter Robert Rauschenberg, as it's framed with spoons, and furnished with wrappers and the appearance of foods. The woman has written something: "... and you who tell me everything."

November 30, 2:39 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Reappear

Fourteen years ago, Michael Rakowitz was struck with a lightning bolt of inspiration that shot up from the ground like the tree of life, as from the hand of Zeus. He began a project of biblical proportions, one to rival the mythic ambitions of Noah. The only difference is that Rakowitz has been thoroughly supported in his endeavors, rising to singular renown in the international art world as a man lauded for addressing the wrongs of Daesh (ISIS) and colonialists who, in the last decades, and over the centuries, destroyed much of Iraq's tangible cultural heritage.

All the while, Rakowitz shoulders the burdens of his seemingly contradictory identities, as an Iraqi American, an Arab Jew. He refers to his family, Baghdadi Jews who emigrated from Iraq and India in the middle of the twentieth century, as the first "installation artists" he ever met. Their home on Long Island was filled with the food, wares and music of Iraq. It was the food, particularly their wrappers, that caught his attention for the ongoing series, *The invisible enemy should not exist*, which is the title for his solo show at Pi Artworks.

For Istanbul's contemporary art scene, showing pieces of Rakowitz's mammoth works in the white cube gallery in the Karaköy quarter is a fortunate boon of immediate and regional importance. As a participating artist in the Istanbul Biennial of 2015, he made waves from the Bosphorus to Anatolia with his installation, *The Flesh is Yours, The Bones Are Ours* (2015), and attracted the likes of Jade Yeşim Turanlı, founder and director of Pi Artworks. She promised him a show and has since delivered. Essentially an excerpt of the nearly one thousand artifacts and reliefs that Rakowitz has made "reappear" together with his studio of apprentices, the Pi Artworks show exhibits a single panel from the Assyrian palace reliefs at Kalhu, also known as Nimrud. At his current pace, it would take Rakowitz another eighty-four years to design his plan to make over seven thousand lost artifacts from the collections of the National Museum of Iraq "reappear." But, as he says, the idea of pursuing a series that will outlive him is the point. It is part of his ethos of epochal, cultural reconstruction.

Against the far wall at Pi Artworks, is Section 1 of Room C from Nimrud, which, sadly, was demolished by Daesh. It is said that their militants broke the priceless Assyrian reliefs down with sledgehammers and smashed them against the floor because they were simply too big for them to carry out and sell on the black market. Rakowitz's intervention rebuilt, or reappeared, the structures as they would have looked to a local gazing in wonder at what was left of them in the National Museum prior to the Daesh takeover.

Using Arabic-language newspapers and food packaging gleaned from Arab food shops, Rakowitz labored with fellow craftworkers in his Chicago studio to create a spectacular likening of the toppled reliefs. The wrappers were especially moving for him to work with, as he started the initiative while shopping in the grocery store of Charlie Sahadi in Brooklyn, which still carried the Iraqi date syrup his family had in their kitchen to sweeten their foods. In a turn of multilayered meaning, he learned that although their brands noted that their products came from Lebanon, they were produced in Iraq and intentionally mislabeled to evade sanctions.

By reproducing the vanished Assyrian reliefs with the cleverly itemized Iraqi wrappers, he approximated his uncanny relationship to objects as a contemporary installation sculptor, seeing the food packaging as a metaphor for the Middle Eastern migrant's fear in America of being exposed as to their true origins in the face of the xenophobic politicization which has demonized Iraqis as an evil enemy to be subjugated and at best tolerated once subdued. Peering at his work, which includes object-based artifacts, the inanimate pieces come alive. *Panel CB-1* (2021) continues from Section 1 to Sections 9 and 10, where the images of the reliefs are sliced in an erratic line that cuts figures off from as high as the waist, but towards the end of the wood panels reveal only the feet. The Assyrian deities, winged men in the high garb of palace elites are reduced to their legs. It is, as Rakowitz confirms, what would have been left of the reliefs by colonial antiquities dealers whose moral compass was about as sophisticated as Daesh's leadership when it came to their respect for Iraq's cultural history.

Rakowitz shies away from certain popular usages, such as to call Assyrian art "ancient" in the interest of revitalizing a more urgent reclamation among Iraq's multicultural communities in the diaspora, of which he has become a vocal and active part. Although he has not yet been to Iraq and remains ambivalent about doing so, his relationship to its past is clear. His artwork is an expression of Iraqi resilience on behalf of a people who have survived countless invasions. He is using fine art to make the Iraqi presence known, and seen, undead, but in full color.

In small print in the shadow of his Assyrian reliefs, which, bursting with vivid spectrums of advertising material, have a decidedly pop art effect. A handbag carried by the burly figure in Section 1 of *Panel CB-1* has an almost effeminate palette. The meticulously intricate craftwork of the piece is plain, reanimating the gold-sandaled "apkallu" demigods, which, despite being headless, retain their sage poise. To add emotionality to the installation, Rakowitz included quotations that contextualize the disappearance of the originals.

The words of an interview subject named Amar grace the cold, bare, concrete flooring of Pi Artworks. He said, "We feel sad, as a lot of people in the villages worked at Nimrud. People would come from all over Iraq to visit this place and now it's gone." The text notes that Daesh destroyed the relief in 2015. A year later, when Nimrud was recaptured by the Iraqi Army, ninety percent of its excavated sites had been razed. The unspeakable loss that Rakowitz is pointing to, however, is not material, but human. A quote under Sections 9 and 10 of the panels, which colonialists left less intact, Rakowitz placed a quote by an Iraqi named Mohammed Sayeed, who said: "After the explosion, I didn't come out of my house for three days. I couldn't look at it, I couldn't accept it. I felt very, very bad." The sense that the Pi Artworks exhibition, *The invisible enemy should not exist*, gives in Istanbul is that while the world is deprived of a massive chunk of its artistic birthright, those who live closest to the desecrated palaces of culture suffer most.

December 8, 11:50 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Intellectualized

At its most conceptually freewheeling and historically avant-garde, the experience of bewilderment that contemporary art can instill is tantamount to living behind a language barrier. With only fragments of understanding, and subject to frames of exclusivity, at once mimetic when not entirely opaque, the harrowing charge of postmodern artists is that they prop up veils of obscurity so dense and wavering that it seems their purpose is to provoke mass confusion ad absurdum.

But if there is a payoff to their wily games, it is that they have achieved in straining out of the indiscernibly diverse public of proudly individual citizens a dissonant chorus of original, critical thinkers who might stay for awhile, and play along. The dizzying cacophony of objectified objects that Emre Hüner has laid out within the whitewashed, sterile museum air in Istanbul's industrial quarter of Dolapdere evokes an unsettling, dystopian mood. Together with the radical curation of Aslı Seven, [*Elektroisolazyon*] is a puzzle of mind-eye coordination.

Like the general trends of fellow conceptualists currently at work within often seamlessly integrated installation-based artwork, metaphysically site-specific, and drifting into transcendent semiotics of form, Hüner has engendered a catalogue of multidisciplinary acts of mediumistic creativity. In brief, there is an obstacle course of sculptures, 3D printed mutations of mechanical organisms, an amphibian genesis of utility and imagination, all encircling the embedded emplacement of a five-hour-plus black-and-white film and a science fiction book.

When thinking about [*Elektroisolazyon*], the question arises, simply, of where to begin. Any potential of narrative order is as confounding as the shapes of its many and varied sculptural elements that appear to be bound only by a fragmented, alphabetical aesthetic. There is, for example, a vast, three-legged construction pillar, the likes of which might be seen under the foundation of a newly excavated behemoth high-rise, or by the side of a highway slated to slice a continent.

If a message might be gleaned from a first impression into Gallery 1 of Arter during [*Elektroisolazyon*] it is that someone's productions are underway. What seems step through is the artlessness of an artistic process. It is plausible to presume that Hüner is exhibiting a venturesome figment of his intellectual obsession with industrialization's effect on society, as if the assembly line in a factory of parts had imploded and he went the next day to collect what interested him most intuitively, bit by bit, reassembling towards an end as illogical as its start.

According to its exhibition guide text, [*Elektroisolazyon*] is not based on, but mediated by a revolutionary exercise in scriptwriting. Whereas filmmaking is sometimes regarded as the quintessentially holistic vehicle by which to express the myriad paths of human creativity, including visual art, performance, drama and music, among other outlets of inspiration, whittling its inner workings down to the technicalities of the screenplay, and how that might be extrapolated on in concrete terms is, conceivably, Hüner's in-context *raison d'être*.



The mad wizardry of disparate items ranges from an odd-numbered line of shoes to a motorcycle helmet, a cash register, manikin heads, gas canisters, scuba gear, flippers, pumps, among countless indistinguishable components. Many of the more quotidian, distinctly perceivable configurations are repeated although covered, discolored and deformed with various layers of epoxy, molds and casts. They are connected by twisted, geometrically inventive workings of poles and panels that make up the installation, *Anoxic Event* (2021).

As the manifold sound piece, *Rainforest V (variation 3)* continues to knock heads with the multiplicity of a Grecian hydra in Arter's "Karbon," a lower-level venue for more aural works and live concerts, to say that *[Elektroisolazyon]* is possibly the museum's most ambitious show to date when it comes to the coalescence of such a profusion of eclectic elements is to make a bold statement. The sheer cornucopia of entities is only outmatched by the length of its film, and the interchangeability of a marquee scrolling with a practical infinity of alternate titles.

In the language of Arter's highfalutin curation, *[Elektroisolazyon]* could be critiqued as nothing more than a self-serving, oblique laboratory by which those who are in the know might sit back and talk amongst themselves in the spirit of a cerebral circus, traveling not so much like medieval troubadours but as futuristic scholars through hyperspace, inside caravans of institutions that stop to unpack along the rarified fringes of the Eurocentric art world. Such an image is not totally unfounded in the course of Hüner's bemusing, fictive output.

The pieces of short fiction that accompany the exhibition are by one, Meliha Erdem, whose biographical sketch at the opening of the slim, twenty-six-page volume is as unconvincing as the sequences of science-fiction writing within the body of its surrealistic prose. There is a curious interplay at work, however, in its presentation along with that of a film, where the mental modalities of text is confined, itself, to more open interpretation as opposed to the multilayered objectivity of onscreen appearances.

A flat monitor held up by a metallic contraption of hollow, bare rails screens the film, *[Elektroisolazyon]*, during which there is a semi-bucolic scene with a character who looks to be someone unhoused, wearing a hoodie over a baseball cap, picking through what is likely a pile of trash. But they grab a piece of it, and seem quite convicted, carrying it over grassy hillocks before the *mise en scène* cuts to the courtyard of a derelict building, the camera still behind a gridded fence. The distant character is heaving the thing they ostensibly took by a rope.

The inexplicability of the film's succession intensifies inside a massive, industrial factory, where an old man stands beside a woman wearing a plastic, transparent raincoat. There is a well-framed closeup of the eccentric duo. The man wears a face of bafflement, holding a transistor radio. The woman does not avert her steady, almost inhuman gaze, as she stares blankly into the distance. Other parts of the film are reminiscent of a past exhibition at Arter by filmmaker Rosa Barba, *The Hidden Conference*, showing the backrooms of art collections.

There is an aesthetic affinity to twentieth century visual criticisms of cultural modernism and its mechanically reproductive discontents throughout Hünér's multiform installation where a wall shows a series of prints after the work of Dutch graphic designer Wim Crowel, particularly his 1967 typeface, *New Alphabet*. When seen alone, the nine pieces on display could be as dissociative as the rest of the outwardly fragmentary exhibition, but when visioned within the show's recurring motifs, pairing and merging organic matter with industrial products, they are complementary to the overall tone of [*Elektroisolasyon*].

December 13, 5:09 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Stasis

AVTO has gone back to its roots with its show, *Static Shifts, Dynamic Rifts*, the debut solo exhibition of Burak Kabadayı following his emergence at a small venue called Pasaj with a piece on time and fiction in collaboration with the children of the Tarlabaşı neighborhood. The work resembled the installation *The Clock* (2010) at Tate Modern by Swiss-American artist and composer Christian Marclay. His current focus on the mechanics of movement and its opposite through recreational car culture has brought him to the right place at AVTO.

Helmed by Sarp Özer, who studied curation while immersed in Milan's art world before working at Salt and Arter as a researcher and writer of such intellectually riveting texts as the "Technopolitical Cookbook," AVTO has grown from well-tilled soil, fertilized by the peculiarly Italian fascination with the aesthetics of mechanical engineering, fired by working-class values and an enduring appreciation for neorealist sentiments. In its lair-like depths, AVTO is screening an array of videos that bridge the divide between art and industry.

Fixed in place with cavernous stalactites of twisted exhaust pipes, backlit with blue, purple and green artificial light, the videos of *Static Shifts, Dynamic Rifts* are color-coded to three themes: Circle, Straight and Oblique. In green, the motif of "Circle" is demonstrated by an especially skillful maneuver in which a car is whipped around in perfect cyclicity, turning on a moving axis that expands outward from a point to form a two-dimensional loop. From above and within the car, Kabadayı allows audiences to glimpse a day in the life of a "gear-head."

In America, the term "gear-head" is generally slapped onto anyone who spends their days in a garage, under the hood of automobiles with all of the know-how of where to tweak. Transmuted through the light of a video, the almost seamless repetition of the piece designated within the "Circle" theme has a resonance with its medium. The subversion of overpopulated society reduced to the consumption and reuse of mass-reproducible objects has an apt outlet in their conversion for nothing short of sheer amusement.

But whereas the art field is sometimes seen as a playground for elites, AVTO is bringing a touch of Italian modernism to Turkey's cultural sector, vivifying the idea of social democracy not through conceptual metaphor masked in highfalutin decoration but through do-it-yourself utilitarian innovation, toward the experimentation of the industrial body. *Static Shifts, Dynamic Rifts* declares that artwork can smell like gasoline, it can growl, snarl and hum, speed off and turn back with the great equalizing force of global economic power.

In her essay for the exhibition's accompanying booklet, Salt curator Amira Akbıyıkoglu compared Kabadayı's documentation of automotive mobility to the dance choreography of Mehmet Sander. Akbıyıkoglu implored readers to refer to Sander's oeuvre, in which he saw bodies as pieces of logistical puzzles based on bewildering technical orders reconfigured, adjusted and progressing along fixed, sometimes confrontational lines. At the same time, as Akbıyıkoglu points out, Sander, like Kabadayı, examined a wide range of physical possibilities.

That is particularly true under the blue light of a video in the “Straight” category at Kabadayı’s show. In the piece a car is burning rubber on the flatbed of a tow truck driving toward the horizon, bursting with a white cloud of smoke. Akbıyıköğlü noted that Sander created a dance work titled *Izafiyet* (in English, *Relativity*), which, similarly, had four dancers performing on top of a truck. The environments in which these car stunts are enacted are as abstract as a stage, or canvas, and many were filmed in outlying manufacturing zones.

The localization of these externalized regions, largely unseen by the consumer class or unassimilated foreigners, is an essential part of the equation with respect to why and how such recreational activity is alluring and even significant. As much as these videos display a passion for what can be done with four interconnected wheels and an engine, they also reveal a need for the people interested in these machines to spread out and move in different ways than that prescribed by the default factory model cars.

By transforming the usage of what is the single most important public commodity to the authoritative economic establishment, these alternative car turners and stunt drivers are reclaiming their sense of direction, not only as a means of getting from one point to another but as a symbol of personal ingenuity, turning in, literally and visually, to become a spectacle of their separation from the norm, marking the territory of their subculture group with tire tracks. But despite their gritty appearance, they are conveying a whole symmetrically unto themselves.

Kabadayı has brought his remote sphere back to the center of cultural capital in downtown Istanbul. His gesture is merging the mentalities of both grease monkeys and armchair intellectuals. Another essayist who contributed to the exhibition is Deniz Kırkalı, whose piece, “Speed, Pleasure, Friction,” begins by defining amateur driving communities as “micro gangs.” In brief, Kırkalı found that the acts of automotive recreation at the core of Kabadayı’s exhibition were indicative of a search for pleasure in purposelessness.

While it might be assumed that mechanical engineers, gear heads and grease monkeys are all undereducated young men just out for the sensation of speed and torque, there is a complexity to their masculine facade. As Kırkalı cleverly wrote in her essay, she saw the attention to friction as a veritable feminine gesticulation, which, by its indirectness can be seen as a performative comment on the nature of physical borders, of individuality and collectivity, and why their reconciliation is simultaneously gratifying, while equally maddening.

There is one video that is strikingly unique in *Static Shifts, Dynamic Rifts*, flooded in purple light, it is part of the “Oblique” series of works, and shows two lateral wheels spinning edgewise against each other within the frame of a tire, creating an optical effect that is as hypnotizing as it is pleasant. It would be just as well to consider the parallel arrangements of motive geometries as a result of observing the tricks of “micro gangs.” From the videos of Circle to Straight, their varying sources of movement are akin.

But by its definition, there is a perpendicularity to the Oblique videos that show how the appearance of movement is really a function of perspective. The question remains of what or who is actually moving at all, especially when the point of their recreational driving is not to go anywhere but to demonstrate something more essential, perhaps that cars are not what they appear to be, and that they are more like simple illusions of individual movement based on the fallacy that anything could be still in this moving world.

December 21, 3:08 PM

## Studio

Mustafa Horasan, better known by his surname alone, does not walk. He swaggers. And with his overconfident stride, a kindly fellow with an outstretched hand and a cool, trimmed, salt-and-pepper beard, he is dressed like he could be on the cover of a glossy men's magazine. He appears to be a late boomer, from that generation of children born in the decades immediately following the economic upswing that came after World War II. He faces his younger, a millennial man who might be called a buster, as his peers came of age in a time when the dream of infinite capitalist growth had shattered.

He faces a wall of some six large-sized paintings awash in color schemes that mirror the heavenly spectra of earthly light, from yellowed blacks to greenish pinks, purpled reds and whitened blues. Each bears a central insignia, almost calligraphic, but wholly nonfigurative beyond the semblances of letter, or even the utterance of sound, or meaning, a point of optical focus proportioned to the height of a man. The pieces speak for themselves in a language of silence in which they reflect only themselves.

Horasan has had a long and fruitful career beginning in the late 1980s in the western province of Izmir. He has been known to paint canvases that are reminiscent of the early twentieth century's aesthetic experiments in form, when artists were changing the course of history, reframing the subjectivity of representation from the portraiture and scenography of biblical decoration to more personal, private depictions of their inner emotional and psychological life.

By turning to abstraction, Horasan is proud to have adapted to the course of the world as introspection has gained in significance, by the collective weight of mass withdrawal. It is, for him, an entirely self-absorbed venture, one that flexes his highly skilled creative muscles. But the effect, finally, exudes a sort of gushing solipsism in the face of a growing need for art that prompts sociopolitical dialogue, or at least expresses a yearning for communication, human connection, while enveloped in the sorrows of unending confinement.

But Horasan is ensconced in his paradisiacal isolation, as an artist. His studio, surrounded by ateliers and cafes in the breezy Anatolian quarter of Yeldeğirmeni, holds an impressive archive of his work, not only as a prolific painter, but as a musician and host to what seems to be Istanbul's bohemian intellectuals whose performative egotism might be as large as the violent, mammoth brushstrokes that he's concocted for his current exhibition, which poses his artwork as part of the canonical stretch of geniuses going back to Bosch, Goya and Monet.

It is said that the tragedy of Mark Rothko was not that his terminal illness was already overwhelming him by the time he took his own life, but that he could not break a vicious circle, one that had kept him locked within the pattern of his unrelenting sense of failure. His late work is large-scale, fit for the walls of a hotel, or a mansion. He was, at last, painting only for the rich when he had long strived for the instantaneous universality of emotion, simply of a reaction, any and all, that might breach the rigid borders of criticism and history to reach hearts.

Now, fifty years later, Horasan is producing abstract paintings that come across as mere painterly exercises, a man working out in front of an audience. Horasan has argued that abstraction has always been present throughout art history. He demonstrated as much by cutting out a square border from a sheet of white printer paper in his studio office, opening a book of Diego Velazquez paintings on his well-stocked bookshelf and showing how details of the paintings can be seen as abstract works unto themselves. His methodology, however, is about as sophisticated as a climate change denier pointing to a thermometer on a cold, winter's day. But he's been out of the academy for a while. And behind the doors of his studio, sheltered by the sound of Anatolian instruments and the hefty precedent of his reputation as a senior artist, his approximation of Monet, for example, comes off as simultaneously virtuosic and yet utterly flat, as if he might have had an alter ego as a successful forger.

Ultimately, his latest series of abstract works is imposing in its spectacle of improvisational form, merging palettes with the foresight and ingenuity of a careful, and perceptive practitioner of paint mixing and action brushing. Yet for all of his precision a seer might beg the question why, and what is it for? Abstraction itself has become nothing more than a mechanical copy of its once sensational arrival on the art scene about a century ago. Before that, as is clear in every major art museum, pictures were only ever figurative. Then came photography, and modernism, and the role of the image was displaced by its ability to remake it so much so that the only difference was its presence, and the power of representation itself, the power to represent others' faces, the nameless objectification of bodies against the faces of elites, or scenes of their leisure, or of workers and their factories, minorities and their struggles. Everyone clashed over formal painting, until the levy broke and the artist smeared the surface of their canvas like the aftermath of a civil war's battlefield.

As part of its commitment to remote accessibility, and with concerns over the ensuing course of the pandemic, Artcrowdistanbul has appropriately mounted a virtual exhibition of the latest works by Horasan, *About Anger, Justice and Serenity*. Linked to a digital exhibition room that can be explored through the internet and coordinated by the curator Melike Bayık, the founder and director of Artcrowdistanbul Şanel Şan Sevinç occasionally then invites people to come and see the works for themselves, in person, at Horasan's studio.

Yet, the tone of special invitation breeds an exclusivity that feels as if they are capitalizing on a copyist's homage to abstraction. And once having arrived at Horasan's studio, the works are not displayed anything like they are online. Instead, Horasan is there to explain as if he were Bosch, Goya or Monet wrapped into one. But he is not, and his paintings are not like those of the ingenious aesthetic and conceptual innovators whose shoulders he claims to stand on. And if they are, it is too difficult to tell, because his originality remains in the shadows against those whose singular lights have not dimmed but shine brighter with age.

December 29, 1:08 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

**2022**



## Humor

By its nature, youth has a rebellious spirit. It feels itself to be different, and so, has a difficult time conforming. That reticence can translate into a kind of adolescent awkwardness that lingers as early adulthood forces binary figments of the social imagination into being, fashioned out of some archetypal construct of human life into which everyone new must fit and be counted by the success and volume of their assumption.

A person, despite scientific terminology, is not reproduced, but shapes themselves according to the unique pressures within which they grow, either out and up, so as to gain a valuable perspective, thus becoming an outsider, or more inwardly and connectedly, so as to integrate into the status quo by copying its trends and identities. In response to such notions, there has been a gaining power to the curations of the The Sequential exhibition series at Salt Galata.

From the archeological politics of Barış Doğrusöz to the editorial concrete of Deniz Gül and the celluloid withdrawal of Volkan Aslan, The Sequential has brushed shoulders with the conceptual polarization of levity and its opposite in a lack of seriousness, or weight, which grounds more mainstream cultural productions to the rigid definitions of tragedy and comedy. In contemporary art, however, the presence of humor maintains a rarefied tone. That is the case with the exhibition, *Belkıs Hanım and Onur Efendi*, at Salt Galata, mounted by artists Fatma Belkıs and Onur Gökmen. At first, the underground space where the artists' works are shown is filled with sculptural pieces that appear somehow off. It is not easy to say exactly why, but they just seem wrong, out of proportion or misplaced, not in their element like fish out of water. They are the art object equivalent of high school dance moves.

A red Japanese-style paper fan is spread out against a wall. Its title reads, *Hittite Sun* in reference to a running theme throughout the show, which includes some seven sculptures all made within the year, and a concurrently produced film, *The Connected*. Although the artists proudly state that it is their debut feature, the duration of the video is less than twenty minutes and comprises three scenes that establish a course of logic as absurd as certain modernist ideals.

Belkıs and Gökmen appear to have satirized the role of the self-important intellectual in the history of late Ottoman society's transition to becoming the citizenry of the Republic of Turkey. One claim that found its way through the pores of fin de siècle Anatolian literati is called the Sun Language Theory, a hypothesis that sought to prove that the Turkic language family was the oldest in the world. The theory developed in the 1930s as Turkish was facing nationalist reforms where Arabic and Persian origin words were being replaced with their Turkic alternatives. It is about as preposterous to expect a nonchalant urban explorer to look at a crooked, reflective metal likeness of a hand fan and imagine that it might stir thoughts of the anachronistic speculation developed in the 1930s, when the Turkish language was subject to nationalist revisions. In the process of sifting out Arabic and Persian, members of the nascent Ankara-based republic were not immune to outlandish conceits.

In their film, *The Connected* there is a scene in which the three main characters sit in a furnished trailer. They are said to represent a writer, painter and actor, all of whom are frustrated by failed attempts to inherit the advances of Tanzimat-era Ottoman culture, and Westernize, by maintaining a scientific foundation to their creative aspirations. But the camera trains its focus on a mustachioed fellow who reads aloud. He declares: “Your excellency, Turkish is the mother of all languages.” And as he says that the first time a human being spoke, they spoke Turkish, he then enunciates the first vowels of the language. “Aa!” he yells, until, finally, his recitation culminates with the word, “Ankara.” At that point, the actor betrays the solemn convictions of his character and cracks a smile. It is not an entirely unfounded gesture, as the film then goes on to take itself less and less seriously.

After a brief interlude in which that reader appears shirtless in a cave, ostensibly looking for an anthropological sign of the Sun Language in the depths of the Earth, the hapless trio are sitting under the stars, whiling away their time as the unsuccessful writer recounts their attempt to come up with names for a story, but stops at Sait and Faik, a humorous nod to the eponymous master of Turkish short fiction. *The Connected* is a far cry from the artful, exacting cinematography of the films by Volkan Aslan for The Sequential, *Stay Safe* (2021), and *Best Wishes* (2019). Instead, perhaps more authentic to their aesthetic roots in the grainy independent cinema of the 1990s, *The Connected* has a B-film, video quality. While there are redeeming shots, the acting is either unfulfilled or over-the-top. But it does retain a satisfying self-awareness throughout.

Because there is a purposeful self-deprecating sense of humor about the film, and because it does not take itself seriously, it has the potential to spark the kind of knowing laughter that throws a hot, critical spotlight on the historical precedent of its material while simultaneously critiquing the guise of contemporary art as a lightly fictionalized portrait of the ongoing failures of intellectuals to live up to the principles to which they aspire personally, and as the result of their presumably enlightened national collectivizations.

In the institutional text published by Salt to contextualize the cryptic exhibition, which might feel like an inside joke, the artists are understood to have been inspired by the famous Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi Bey. One of the sculptures, *Revolt Against the Sun* (2021) apparently depicts bureaucratic pressures in the life of Hamdi Bey. It is a contraption of wood, an open door over a floor of intertwining boards, leading into a compartment. The centerpiece of *Revolt Against the Sun* seems to be a strange object, with a pale, yellowish-green surface, inside the bowels of the curious, half-constructed assemblage. A more direct reference to Hamdi Bey, might be the piece, *Hamdy attacked by the great white* (2021), in which the likeness of a shark and a man are side by side in unfinished wooden boxes, inferring the waywardness of Turkey’s museological foundations, the eccentricities of its roundabout, even imposed, cultural transformations in the spirit of the West, albeit misguided.

January 5, 5:02 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Pedagogy

Behind every thing is a thought. That might be a proper adage for the curatorial work of Aslı Seven, whose range extends from the literary conceptualism of ficto-critical writing, a kind of hybridization of fact and fiction in anthropological journalism, to an astute reading of ecological history. The environmental poetics of her exhibition, *Saint Joseph: Beats of a Fabulous Machine*, sprawls throughout two buildings on the campus of the Saint-Joseph French High School in the Anatolian district of Kadıköy.

By the year 1910, two brothers, Frere Possesseur Jean and Frere Paramont-Felix had amassed a collection of natural objects that encompassed the extent of their entomological and geological fascinations with their surroundings. With exhaustive scrutiny, they examined bugs and rocks along the coastal, forested cliffs of Moda down to the seaside streams of Kurbağalidere. Inside the present-day school, there is a comprehensive sample of taxidermies of Turkey's floral and faunal biodiversity at their world-class Natural Sciences Museum.

Down one of its halls, there are photographs showing how life was for a Frère when Istanbul was reeling from the revolutionary upheaval of its post-1908 era. As the conflicts of World War I and the Balkan Wars unraveled Ottoman territories in Europe, Francophone Christians in Kadıköy were absorbed in an ambitious project, imparting a momentum of naturalist scholastic that would not only last for the next century, but that has come to develop into widening circles of cultural and scientific inquiry.

That prophetic vision has born fruit, and none so ripe as the vivid intellectuality of Seven, who reimagined the castle-like architecture of the school to house the idea of images as concepts termed “fabulous machine” and “radiant beat.” The singularities in her vocabulary are only matched by the artists that she has chosen to spotlight within the dim reaches of the historic property. Adapting the educative establishment of Saint-Joseph as a kind of machine, Seven has reanimated the incubative potential of its interiors with a contemporary gaze.

There is an opening room at Saint-Joseph French High School, just around the corner from the entrance to one of its broadest, main buildings. If the exhibition can be said to begin, as it certainly does not appear from the outset or in retrospect to have a linear narrative arc, then, at least spatially, it would start with a multiform installation of paintings by Ekin Kano. With a lunar, and underwater ambiance, Kano bears a subtle, though empowered ability to project empathy for nature, through otherworldly explorations of its textural transformations.

The delicate superficiality of the imagination is an integral part of the art that Kano has produced for Saint Joseph, as the compact room flickers with a documentary film by the research duo Eda Aslan and Dilşad Aladağ. The landscapes shown in their video, *Neşvünema* (2021) are practically extraterrestrial, barren, something out of science fiction or the remote renderings of far-flung planetary surfaces. As an expression of their project, *Garden of (not) Forgetting*, the piece

follows the travel archives of Alfred Heilbronn, who with his wife Mehpare, founded and developed the Istanbul University Institute of Botany.

Narrated in Turkish and French by Seven, *Neşvünema* is complemented by a double-sided printout showing where the intrepid couple traveled as part of their botanical expedition in eastern Anatolia, from eastern provinces Elazığ to Van. On the way they crossed the southeastern provinces of Diyarbakır, Batman and eastern Bitlis, cataloging over four hundred specimens as they went. Around the bend into the belly of the school, there are works by Daniel Otero Torres and Emin Fırat Övür. The miniature and faded aesthetics of the works are aptly placed within the show's trailing echoes of historical curiosity.

As the exhibition is open to the public during evenings later in the week, and weekends, the school takes on a sense of abandonment, an emptiness, while assistants guide seers through the eeriness of its sudden desolation. The aura is unsettling as if there were a catastrophe and everyone had to flee the city or even Earth. The total absence of people in a space that is usually filled with students and teachers compelled by the mandatory order of society to conform, accents the critical presence of art as a pedagogy of civil disobedience.

The darkroom series of Övür comprises eight works. Among them, prehistoric traces of smudged handprints frame the organic contents of an image, that of a beach scene in which wet sand is impressed with a dog's footprints. Within its layered visioning of human sight, and the disappearance of an animal, Övür is in dialogue with pieces by Torres, an artist from Columbia whose drawings feature meticulous, surrealistic depictions of everyday work life in which people and animals are burdened with the task of constructing their environment.

From a more artistic angle, the film of Julien Prévieux is an exquisite piece of cinematographic precision, with a well-written, philosophical voiceover that muses on the materialization of grace through dance choreographies in which bodies are reduced to sequences of moving lights. Screened in a plush classroom theater, *Patterns of Life* (2015) is one of the show's peaks, instilling the sensibility of Seven's "radiant beat" by evoking the meaning of nature as a performative process of creativity.

In the adjacent room, a large-scale installation by Iz Öztat gleaned antique furniture from Saint-Joseph, in particular a bookcase, stocked with massive, worn tomes, and which appears to double as a Catholic confession booth. It is as if scientific knowledge was being subject to religious interrogation, which is subtextual to the historiographical work of Eda Aslan and Dilşad Aladağ. As a quiet seer might wander about the vitrine, eyeing naturalist posters of plants and animals, the unseen rate of current-day extinctions is as haunting as it is real.

In an equally ambitious, room-wide installation piece, artist Seren Şehitoğlu displayed a phrase, in French, "Calypso could not be consoled by the departure of Ulysses." And in the middle of the vacant, silent room, there is an elegant chessboard, set with all of its pieces ready for a match. On the blackboard, there is a series of equations that could indicate the potential course of play. It is

as if someone had too much time on their hands, and was waiting for something to happen, like a concerted response to climate change, only to succumb to the endlessly self-absorbing, mathematical diversions of a difficult game.

*Saint Joseph: Beats of a Fabulous Machine* follows its conceptual paths to a smaller building across the school lawn, where the paintings of Maude Maris and Komet are referential with that of Kano's sculptural tableaus and a plastic response to the work of Maris by Öztat. Seven brought her train of thought about the works of Emre Hüner from a museum gallery in Arter to a more condensed, and perhaps more focused installation for a reboot, *[[[u]Ur-ElektR]]* (2021). Opposite its space works by Maris and Torres are as quirky as a film by Virginie Yassef behind a curtain, *Dogs Dream. It Wasn't Meant To Be Known* (2021). Yassef's focus on sleeping street dogs is as dreamy as the somnolent, apathetic apocalypse.

January 12, 11:43 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Retrospect

As a child growing up around the Aegean villages of Izmir province, the painter Toygun Özdemir loved his maternal grandfather. In particular, he found his stories to be fascinating. Even if they were set not far from their quaint, bucolic coastal environment, they were from another world. As his grandfather smiled at him, giving him the kind of affection that is specially shared across the divide of three generations, its distance of time and perspective making the heart grow fonder, Özdemir found that he was hearing the voice of someone who, although familiar, represented an entirely different worldview.

Then tragedy struck, as his grandfather suffered the horrors of a neurological disease that affected his ability to speak. His stories were fading from his mouth, but not from Özdemir's sharp and visually perceptive young mind. His pride in his grandfather was only accentuated when he reflected on his life as an uneducated man who had come from a tough family background in which his siblings and relatives were rarely, if ever, formally schooled. But his grandfather was different. He taught himself accounting and ran a successful business that enabled his grandson to choose his course of study and be an artist.

After his passing, his spouse, Özdemir's grandmother, had a fit and nearly threw all of his effects into a blazing fire. Luckily, Özdemir was present and had his wits about him enough to save a cache of antique photographs. Among them were countless visual cues to the stories he had remembered hearing, of his grandfathers' brother, for example, a dashing, well-dressed, twenty-something fellow who drowned during a military training exercise. His absence would mark a persistent call to despair, a scar that ran down the face of the family as they looked at each other with the longing nostalgia of their incalculable losses.

For Özdemir, the photographs were a boon of inspiration. He used them as the basis for visualizing the series of paintings that he came to identify within the scope of his exhibition at Öktem Aykut, entitled, *Golden Age*, in reference to the years in Turkey following the death of Atatürk in 1938, and the ensuing political turmoil that came in the wake of that unspeakably significant event in the memory of Turkish citizens, whether they were born while it happened or not. Özdemir's paintings show that, despite direct knowledge, the multigenerational traumas shared by a nation are communicated through stories.

Despite the overwhelming trend to merge with the ideological conceptualism and multimedia installation art of the globalized, postmodern milieu Özdemir has focused on the traditional painting discipline. His brushwork is reminiscent of late impressionism that thickened the lines of Vincent Van Gogh, his traces of arboreal sketching then evoking something of the evolutionary spirit of New York's 1980s painter Keith Haring. As a graduate of the prestigious Mimar Sinan University's Faculty of Fine Arts, Özdemir went against the grain, not only by working on figurative oils, but by prioritizing story over idea.

Özdemir could be compared with the Nigerian artist Toyin Ojih Odutola, who used pastel, charcoal and pencil drawings to explore narrative. Born in 1985, a year before Özdemir, Odutola, however, painted fictional history in the interest of imagining a better future for disadvantaged communities in Africa. In contrast, Özdemir is a visual storyteller with the eye of a documentarian and an intuitive grasp of past's resonance in the present. His canvases embrace a pluralistic fluidity, reflecting the multitasking affinities of the digitally-infused, millennial mind to perceive and interpret many pictures at once.

There is a chronology to Özdemir's paintings at *Golden Age*, beginning with a piece titled, aptly, *GOLDEN AGE No: 1 'Compensation'* (2021). The painting appears to be based on three photographs, but whether by composition or proportion, they are altered. The largest frames an aspect of Özdemir's grandfather's brother, whose untimely death sends a psychological shiver through the ghostly evocations that, in the style of Özdemir's oils, waver in form like mental apparitions that might be remembered from a dream-state, or over a rippling, reflective pool. In the corner of the painting there is a likeness of a photograph that was taken in a stupor, where the cloudy visages of three men feast over a table of revelers.

There is an ominous aura about the headless man centered in *GOLDEN AGE No: 1: 'Compensation'*. His memory is ostensibly linked with a turbulent political moment defined by the long shadow cast by the fate of Adnan Menderes and the historiographic ambiguities that arise in the absence of social cohesion on a national scale. *GOLDEN AGE No: 1: 'Compensation'* includes an essential image of five figures standing before a rural scene. Özdemir has conceived that part of his work to refer to the building of a specific ship named "Tatvan," made to sail on Lake Van in eastern Anatolia between 1948 and 1955.

The story of Tatvan is a metaphor, clarified by Özdemir's able hands, for the saga of twentieth-century modernization that Turkey faced head-on, confronting a blank slate in which the past was being refashioned for the conveniences of its contemporaries. Similarly, in early works Özdemir would quote from the range of art history, painting miniature paintings within a scene in which his self-portrait sat beside white, unpainted canvases. In other words, or images, Özdemir seems to be saying, with paint, that Turkey's artists are often at a loss for their history and must find it at the edge of a backyard fire, in the hands of an elder bent on forgetting.

In Özdemir's modest Yeldeğirmeni studio, he has the stack of photos that he saved from his grandmother's sacrificial rite. In one of the bent pictures, his grandfather is leaning on the hood of a classic 1950's automobile, wearing work clothes in the typical air of the day. He is accompanied by a woman and a blonde boy. They are surrounded by a forested highway. Özdemir cites the 1930 William Faulkner novel *As I Lay Dying* as inspiration, not only for the relative concurrence, but for the fragmented anti-formalism of its narration. And it was an epistolary literariness that fired his imagination as he read the back of the photos.

In the painting, *GOLDEN AGE No: 3 'The Host'* (2021), Özdemir does not bother with multiple frames, instead of merging that heirloom roadside picture with a mythical eruption of themes that

speaking directly to how Özdemir has attempted to understand the social ambiance and the political mood of his grandfather's day. The piece features a beast, a Leviathan as the artist calls it, strung up against a tree. He is asking that eternal question of how to check power when a society of so-called equals upholds the enforcement of rules. But holding his humble ground, his grandfather stood up with a confident poise, ready for the road ahead.

January 19, 2:42 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey



## Harmonious

The abstract painter Agnes Martin saw the subtle gradations of color on her canvases as a kind of musical expression. Like notation, her process included a mathematical complex of proportional inventions by which she would bring the image that had come to her mind into the sensual world of painted space. When critiqued, she defended her almost opaque minimalist abstractions as the “pure emotion” of music, against the explanatory demands that were largely made in the name of contemporary art’s status quo intellectuality.

Perhaps similarly, the art of Füsün Onur is presumably a provocation of tonal visuality, of harmony, dissonance, rhythm and melody, however unstrung and unsung. That much is clear by the texts of Emre Baykal’s curation of her show, *Opus II – Fantasia*, a remount from 2001 titled after terms of classical composition, the first of which identifies a separate piece, often dated according to its publication, followed by a genre of free form improvisation enjoyed by almost every important composer since the Renaissance. The works are placed in a spare configuration that might tickle the fancy of such object-based musicological artists of the Fluxus persuasion as curated by Melih Fereli in other shows at Arter, such as, *For Eyes That Listen*. What comes to mind, most popularly, are the calligraphic and nonlinear measures of notes by John Cage, reminiscent of surrealist collage, their indications of sound as texturally interpretive as they are invitations to perform on readymade instruments.

Distilled to very few shapes and materials, *Opus II – Fantasia* has a mirror effect against the whitewash museum gallery halls in which it is meticulously situated. A series of rectangular plinths, for example, almost exactly matches that of Arter’s interior architecture. Then, arrangements of knitting needles are spread across the floor in neat displays, like that of checked lines, a semblance of diatonic fifths. The reappearance of balls of gold braid is as mystifying as the miniatures of delicate porcelain figures standing on the clean wooden floors.

Onur, born in 1938, is a relic of the old guard among Turkey’s critical art historians. Bursting onto the international art scene, fired by the singular flame of her worldview as a Turkish woman of the late twentieth century, couched in an upper-class, westward gaze, fresh from the estuarial climes of the Chesapeake Bay as a graduate of Maryland College of Art, she returned to Turkey in the early 1970s.

Inspired by her worldly vistas, she started working from her childhood home in the Bosphorus neighborhood of Kuzguncuk, its breezy airs giving her just the perspective she needed to reflect on the role of sculpture in a country where public space and contemporary art were contested by the eternal dramas of human tragedy. She would sip her tea under a swaying plane tree and contemplate her capacity to transform Istanbul itself as sculptural expression. And looking out over the Bosphorus from her pacific nook, eyeing such splendors as Dolmabahçe Palace, she knew that she would have a hand in transforming their procession through the blank canvas where history and the future met at the confluence of the present. Such backstories are integral to

*Opus II – Fantasia*, as an adjacent room on the floor of the main exhibition offers ample reading material about the artist's long life and prolific works.

In 1977, she developed her approach to site-specificity on the exquisite grounds of Dolmabahçe Palace. But it was Istanbul's local art world, namely Maçka Sanat Galerisi (translated from Turkish as Maçka Art Gallery), where she found room to test her artistic explorations into the spatiality of music, namely with shows like, *Cadence* (1995) and *Prelude* (2001). Ultimately it was Germany's Kunsthalle Baden-Baden that first showed *Opus II – Fantasia*. Risen amid the decadent glitz of early republican Turkey's so-called golden age in which the late imperial upper class had yet to fully merge into meritocratic, middle-class democracy, the timing of Onur's career is essentially on the cusp of classist issues in relation to art history in Turkey as its leading creatives broke ranks with Orientalist Francophiles and made way for the ongoing path toward its universalization, not without a few pebbles, or boulders, in the way. And even in a European context, her art seems to maintain her rarefied nouveau-bourgeois enigma.

The 2021 revitalization of *Opus II – Fantasia* is not different. It does not appear to be concerned with prompting a new vision of intelligent, emotional communication with seers who might immerse themselves in her mysterious, repetitive aesthetic of curiously concerted objects entwined into utterly silent, spatially imbued metaphors for music. Without reference to her oeuvre, especially works like *Blue Counterpoint with Flowers* (1982) or *Dividing the Space on a White Piece of Paper* (1966), *Opus II – Fantasia* is painfully aloof. In the interest of canonizing luminaries of Turkish contemporary art anew, *Opus II – Fantasia* resounds at Arter with the impressionistic euphony of its curatorial thematics, pleasant and mellifluous as the clarity of its accented emptinesses. But it is also an agonizing, self-absorbed haute design for those among the culturati familiar with the unsaid mimesis of their perfectly bubbly socioeconomic classism. When reconsidering the idea of the national canon while simultaneously striving for domestic and global relevance, there are apt to be pitfalls.

In a booklet insert printed with the catalog for Onur's past solo exhibition in Istanbul, *For Careful Eyes*, featuring the writing of Margrit Brehm, Baykal wrote a brisk essay titled, "An Afternoon with Füsün and İlhan Onur" in which he described his visit to their quaint home in Kuzguncuk. In fact, his descriptions are meticulous, down to the "porcelain plates, embroidered tulle curtains, needlework covers, this is a living museum," he wrote. Onur told him that her father encouraged her to pursue art because he failed to succeed in it. It was March of 2007 when Baykal wrote of her for the Yapı Kredi Publications book, and her portrait, while still elegantly beautiful, had aged her well apart from her prime in the 1970s, when she was one of Turkey's foremost art stars inheriting the spectacular pride that had lionized the likes of Fahrelnissa Zeid and Füreya Koral. Her unfading prominence is more a cause for wonder now than celebration, and rightly so, as *Opus II – Fantasia* is less like the inescapable charm of music than an unplayed sheaf of sheet music being passed around to a tone-deaf audience.

January 25, 5:37 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Canon

When a new generation of artists work, their generation assumes something of the spirit of individuality that goes hand-in-hand with a genuinely creative process, what might be understood as the shedding of skin. To put it bluntly, they might change their personal identity, or revise their approach to what they have done, to do it differently. It is a tension that balances the essential spirit of art-making, which might be defined as the attempt to express what can not be expressed, or, at least, what has not yet been expressed.

In art, it is the trial that counts, unlike the norms of industrial capitalism, and their echoes throughout society, focusing on products, results, analytics, benefits even politics. But in retrospect, something uncanny tends to occur within a single generation, which, whether its members are collegial or not, inclines toward intuitive kinship, as if they were bouncing their ideas off the same wall, dashing preconceived conceits that no longer served their interests, nor that of the general public, despite the resonance of critical, historical or academic import.

The twenty artists featured in the group show at Istanbul's Alan art gallery inherited the European entelechy of visual culture, and in many cases subconsciously absorbed their distinctive Turkish cultures without very overt references to their eastward orientation. Their photographs, paintings and sculptures convey the singular immunity of modern art toward isolated intellectualism, and distanced from religion, they reach for a palpable connection with the otherworldly sources of insight into the holistic nature of the human experience, in relation to the greater environment.

In paint, plastic and pictures, Turkey's twentieth-century artists were moving toward what their more recent and globalized successors around the world have imbued into installation art, or the meta-reflexive criticism of the artist's institutional contextualization. They were working in a more rarefied market, one in which the commoditization of their works was circumscribed by the overarching object-based ontology of art dealers. It is no coincidence, then, that they are presented to Istanbul's eager public not through a curatorial platform but by collectors.

On first entering the relatively sterile, lobby-like concourse of halls that wrap around within the interior of Alan's galleries, there are large-format photographs by Istanbul's laureate of black-and-white stills, the late and inimitable Ara Güler, whose face is about as recognizable as the early pieces of Bosphorus dockworkers that made him and Istanbul's modernity famous. His images speak to the bygone era in which the artists of the Alan show also lived, a time that also informed their creative visions of radical aesthetic reinterpretations. Among his unsparingly direct portraits is that of Burhan Doğançay, holding his pipe with the look of an elder statesman, the son of a military painter who cut his teeth on canvases in Paris and New York, a man whose apparent self-importance is backed by a lifetime of well-earned respect. He sits, gazing into Güler's camera with eyes that had seen the world unfold, his reading glasses perched atop his forehead. And behind him is a painting out of a series that bookends the circular drift of artworks throughout the chock-full show at Alan.

In November of 2009, when modern Turkish art sold better than Turkey's classical crafts for the first time, Doğançay was at the center of that momentous, yet relatively unsung shift with the sale of one of his works for 2.2 million Turkish liras (then \$162,279). That history was discussed in a book by music scholar Martin Greves entitled, *Makamsız*, published in 2017. It is almost clear in his works just how he raced ahead of the pack among his peers, as his art fought for breath under the surface of painting, like that of his American contemporary Robert Rauschenberg. Doğançay and Rauschenberg played with perception and dimensionality while not giving sway to the temptations of pop and optical art. If traversing counter-clockwise through the building, the conclusion of the Alan show features such relatively simple works as an acrylic by Doğançay titled, *Ship Shave V* (1973), in which figments of papery textures cast shadows over the formal, if surrealist, depiction of a sailboat. His emphasis on absence and emptiness, both of background and in his representationalism, reveals a postmodern, minimalist range.

The wide spectrum of paintings, which make up the bulk of the artists' media, is only outmatched in summoning intrigue by the artists' biographies. Their photographed portraits are displayed throughout the show, with a few lines of description about their lives. Fikret Mualla, for example, is listed as a "big bohemian" who partied and styled himself as an anarchist. Numerously, he checked into a mental hospital before leaving for France in 1938, two years before the Nazis occupied the art-loving nation.

Mualla is beloved in Turkey much in the way that expressionists are in Germany, or surrealists in France, as his paintings took on a derivative post-impressionistic flair that seemed to have subsumed cubism into a unique distillation of the genre as a form of mental exile, mirroring that of Mualla's transnational convictions. An artist who might be seen as a parallel could be Nejad Devrim, who, as an ardent iconoclast in pursuit of his own voice, had a falling out with his mother, the famous painter Fahrelnissa Zeid, and died poor in Poland. There is a painting by Zeid at the Alan show, in the same room as that of Devrim's work. It is an oil, portraying a woman, seated alone in a room. She appears to be ashamed, blushing from the legs up, her head down on a floating, layered loveseat that might double as symbolic of her neglected flesh. Meanwhile, Devrim went east, and took loftier perspectives, with such paintings as *Central Asia, Uzbekistan Domes* (1960), a naive-looking landscape that betrays his formidable art education from Berlin to Paris.

Other artists among the Alan show who stretched backward in search of ways to interact with their imperial Turkish past, skipping the didactics of their antecedents, included Abidin Dino, whose untitled sketches on official Ottoman ephemera are striking in their bold, playful critique on collective, institutional art in contrast to private, personal creativity. He did the same with French newspapers too, such as his piece, *May '68* (1968), caricaturing the serious tone of the cultural moment with an outsider's taste for the beautifully indifferent difference.

February 1, 2:01 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Context

If the artist is a visionary, one who sees through time and space, and by the power of their foresight imparts that potential energy over to those who share in the grace of their talent and intuition, then they are, for lack of more transcendent words within the late capitalist mire, a valuable commodity. The physicality of their exposure to the realities of institutionalization, with its industrious accounting for the gritty details of financial expense and prime investment, runs parallel to a world of gambled debt and related symbolic schemes that make the art world look like a prudish monk compared to its excesses.

Yet, in the interest of its origins, steeped in the humanist values that gave way to liberal, democratic entrepreneurship among makers. They are workers, although trading in ideas metaphorically or mimetically, lathered onto canvases, or chipped away from blocks of stone. Producers of contemporary art must confront the more vestigial components of the zeitgeist with a sharp edge and be prepared to sever that ghost limb from the collective body that so doggedly maintains ties to the anciens régimes of its former, or anachronistic, superiors. Museums, simply, have a troubled relationship to the art of their contemporaries who defy post-colonialist methods of collection, ownership and display in favor of practices that would foment the stimulation of indoor, public spaces that are truly inspiring, which strike at the classical Grecian roots of museology, a place for the muses. Across northern Europe and the Americas, however, deaccessioning is increasingly becoming synonymous with repatriation as curators and artists reconcile with their respective national consciences.

*Precaution*, at Arter, addresses the complex thought processes that play into the multitiered readiness for the future in which art lovers are more and more political. Its title follows from an installation piece by Canan Tolon, readapted after its initial exhibition in 2011 at Arter's prior space on Istiklal Avenue. Approaching the work is like sliding into an antique, neglected waterfront Bosphorus mansion in the dark watches of the night, when the ghostly late Ottoman spirit of its foundations rattle with so many deaths, generations who passed into shade much like the history of old art exhibitions, archives lost to the whims of postmodernity.

Tolon's artistic, architectural erudition comes forward in her piece *Precaution*, sensitive with respect to time's effect on material. It is reminiscent, also, of the work of a younger Turkish artist, Gülşah Mursaloğlu, whose process-based sculptural installations examine the surface of industrial products and their decay. Both focus on temporal constructs, to reflect the mutability of their chosen mediums. When walking beneath the rusty scaffolding and torn rags of *Precaution* the ambiance is unsettling because it is not the facade or display that is subject to decomposition, but its rickety setup, albeit centered. The exposure of destabilizing factors behind the scenes of the apparent gloss and glam of cultural production is all the more disturbing. It is like watching an actor break character, only to realize that they do not exude stereotypical Hollywood star power, but a mere whiff of human normalcy, the everyone everywhere, without a spotlight, the anonymity of the unknown, yet utterly familiar any-person. Within the show, according to Baykal's perspicacious selection, the artists convey, subvert, question and document these

themes with creative perspective and sometimes quite amusing reinventions of visual and conceptual meta-narratives.

One specific video work from *Precaution* comes to mind, titled, *Crisis and Control* (2013) by Burak Delier. It is essentially a short essay film consisting of interviews with office workers who practice yoga as a therapeutic outlet in the midst of their busy lives. They speak to the camera while holding the various poses they've learned from the ancient Hindu craft of physical enlightenment, enacting the universal dualism inherent in the body, whereby the contrast between stretching and relaxation runs parallel to the inhale and exhale of breath. While standing on his head in the middle of a hallway, a man in a suit confesses the emotional stress he endured after having to fire a colleague. That scene, among others, makes *Crisis and Control* not only entirely watchable in full but also riveting throughout, as it enters into the unsightly bowels of work psychology. A comparable and equally mesmerizing video piece is by the labor-oriented videographer Ali Kazma, titled, perhaps not without a sense of humor, *Noah's Ark* (2019-2021). For anyone who has been attending exhibitions and the events at Arter's Dolapdere museum, it is a staple record of Istanbul's art heritage.

While the singular and multivalent collections at Arter enjoy the ongoing effects of their historically revitalizing, spatial makeover, the exhibition of Kazma's video, *Noah's Ark* is a well-polished mirror against an otherwise one-sided reflection within the rarefied art world of Istanbul and its slowly expanding roster of prominent artist nationals. Yet, with a critical grasp of its global import, *Precaution* platforms the voices of artists from across the region, particularly Alicia Kwade of Poland and Lamia Joreige of Lebanon, as well as Nasan Tur, who is Turkish by descent and affiliation within Eurasia's complex sociopolitical realm. Kwade's ready-made sculpture, *Hubwagen* (2012/2013), recalls the aesthetics of Palestinian installation artist and filmmaker Jumana Manna, or, closer to home, the deviant and subtly dysfunctional furniture of Can Küçük. Joreige's work at *Precaution* is deeply prolific, comprehensively scrutinizing Beirut's struggle with museum collection in the face of postcolonial art infrastructures that have disempowered institutions on the fringes of the Eurocentric culture sector, with its dusty archaeological fetishes and economic impositions that hang like a shadow over the Levant in the name of restorative technology and global legacy.

As part of Joreige's piece, *Objects Missing from the National Museum of Beirut* includes a textual presentation of a book with that title within a vitrine. It itemizes lost artifacts like "Stele of the Pharaoh Ramses II with a Hieroglyphic Inscription," a basalt relief found in Tyre from the thirteenth century B.C. The dizzying kaleidoscope of the past's layers of provenance is a perennial matter of serious discussion where objects and their curation are concerned with respect to the overlapping geographical Pandora's box of the Middle East. It is a region defined by shared cultures but whose peoples are confounded by the rapid advances of modernism, be they artists, or anyone whose belongings are interwoven with their possessive sense of place.

February 8, 3:36 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Here

Within the mainstream rut of Istanbul's municipal culture, the quicksand intractability of life is often as painfully uninspired as the next concrete high-rise somewhere far on the edges of the city's sprawling, octopus-like mass. And it expands outward, to cartoonish dimensions, overblown like a caricature in which its blemishes and faults are accentuated, even highlighted because they are utterly human, and in that way endearing, or at least worthy of compassion. But Istanbul's hard and fast reality is generally immune to such soft and rosy sentiments.

For these reasons and untold others, an art exhibition in response to Istanbul as a whole is a curatorial challenge out of the myths of Greek heroism. That's where Kevser Güler stepped in, and up, to the platform of superlative achievement, as is her track record amid the uppish halls of such establishments as Arter. She has come to symbolize a different way to exhibit art, one that provokes its audience to think for themselves while exploring the profundity of her artists' subjects and their contexts, materially and intellectually.

In her prefatory text, as one of the opening introductions to the thick book that accompanies the prolific show, Güler used the buzzing term "neoliberal capitalism" as a way to understand the struggles that Istanbul has endured, in response to its recent uptick of monumental environmental and sociological shifts. Instead of using the place name "Istanbul" in the title, as was true for the earlier, briefly concurrent exhibition at Sakıp Sabancı Museum, *Past Present Istanbul*, she simply, cleverly, landed on *This Place*.

At Sakıp Sabancı Museum, professor and artist Murat Germen curated representations of the city along similar although largely divergent lines in relation to Güler's work at YKKS. *This Place*, like its title, follows a certain ambiguity. The question is persistent throughout Istanbul's multivalent, layered histories, of what it is, and even what it is called, for who, when, where, how, why. And by foregrounding younger artists, alongside deceased historical painters and older generations, Güler propped up her curation of the city like the answer to a question.

The question, however, is where the artists come in. But they ask it not in the manner of daily speech, with its prosaic machinations, but through the surrealistic vocabularies of images, space, even feelings and in some cases simply an awareness of context, a wavering focus on the emptiness that surrounds any given point of attention. As with her recent Arter exhibition, *On Celestial Bodies*, Güler has a knack for correlating seemingly contrasting ambiguities within the setup, placement and titling of the artworks as displayed.

Under the calculated, though, at times also lighthearted efforts of Güler's curation, YKKS has transformed into a research hall, unfolding inwardly to a pluralistic vision of Istanbul's layered pasts. From the outset of the exhibition, a video and photography installation by Sinem Dişli lead seers into an investigation of Yarımburgaz Cave, which is also the name of her piece. It is, like much of the work at *This Place*, an exhaustive archive of a contemporary artist's practice, their multimedia productions focused on a specific ecology.

Located in the western reaches of Istanbul's Thracian lands, stretching outward to the Greek and Bulgarian borders, Yarımburgaz Cave is a uniquely fruitful site for scientists and excavators with an eye on everything from Byzantine ruins to Stone Age artifacts. In her more artistic portrayal, Dişli showed the graffitied inner walls, which, in thousands of years may still bear the traces of someone's 1978 birthdate scrawled along the rocky curves of its interior. Photographs of various passages, surfaces and findings are annotated with her handwriting.

There is a cartographic profusion of insights into Istanbul's urban area, seen not only from the vantage point of moderns, but throughout its every record of geological formation and human settlement. Güler made a point to intersperse archaic ephemera, such as a number of city maps, written in the old Arabic script of Ottoman-Turkish. To see Istanbul's trendiest, weekend youth lifestyle district of Moda, Kadıköy meticulously laid out in the antique style of the city's bygone predecessors is to reconsider the passage of time as equally cavernous.

In the interest of universality, transcending Istanbul's singular lure, *This Place* also addresses the enigmas of space, as defined, because, by definition, it actually indicates a gap, somewhere to be occupied. Many of the artists grasped this well, among them Deniz Aktaş, whose meticulous, naturalist drawings show a vacant ecology, a grassy field inhabited with an unidentifiable presence of form, or its absence. Güler went back into dusty painting collections to convey the idea, exhibiting Migirdiç Civanyan's empty seas in *Ship in the Storm* (1894).

One of the more peculiar voices among the exhibition's artists in terms of straight, pictorial depiction, is by the characteristically provocative multidisciplinary Nilbar Güreş, whose C-print photos are uncanny in their sociological admixtures, set within environments that are equally supernatural as they are hyper-realistic. One of the two pieces exhibited is titled, *Watering the Roots* (2010), from the artist's Çırçır Series, in which a secularly dressed middle-aged woman absurdly pours a small, electric kettle of water onto the upturned roots of a dead tree.

*Watering the Roots* foregrounds a more traditionally dressed woman, similarly aged, holding an older type of tea kettle. But she looks away from the uprooted tree, and from the chaotic scene of an industrial mountain tunnel construction behind them. Beside her, the more apparently environmentally-minded woman is dressed in black daywear with a modern scarf around her neck, wearing reading glasses. In a single still, Güreş has managed to portray the dualistic drama of life in Turkey, in which differences in class and culture are exposed every day.

A few of the artworks at *This Place* had an interactive element, offering audiences opportunities not only to interact within the localizing nexus of the show but also in the interest of connecting to the world through Istanbul's multicultural soul. Istanbul could be said to be one of the deepest roots of humanity. Its linguistic diversity is as diverse as its soil, which is a point made quite freshly by Ali Taptık, whose piece, *Postcards for Gardener's Cookbook* (2016) includes verdant typography in Turkish, Kurdish, Greek, English and Armenian.



But the scale and degree of work shown and referenced in *This Place* is only paralleled by the hilariously satirical and cheekily ambitious Zeyno Pekünlü, whose installation, *Everything I know* (2015-ongoing) is comprised of printed paper on which a practically endless enumeration of statements is written, describing every conceivable thing that the artist can be said to know. It is an apt metaphor for *This Place*, and for Istanbul, a city with vast sources of knowledge and experience, which, in a postmodern context, is best left to art.

February 15, 2:46 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Heart

Within the elegant reaches of an antique Pera apartment, the contemporary art space Galerist maintains its singular aesthetic, touching on the sensitive zone where the decorative becomes philosophical, like the seer themselves immersed in surroundings that glow and spark with ideas manifest under dim, cinematic lighting and sunny, domestic rooms. And what better muse to bring art together, like the joyous cosmology of a live audience, than the muse-keeper himself, the late modern meistersinger Leonard Cohen.

Ascending the stone steps of the historic building in Pera, entering the foyer space at Galerist for the show, *True Love Leaves No Traces*, a work by Chilean-born artist, architect and filmmaker Alfredo Jaar conveys the natural disaster of human war, how its self-destructive capacity for chaos cycles back to the lives of creatives, prompting the inspiration derived from their struggles in a world where songs are deafened by blasts. In his large-print photograph, *Milano* (1946), Argentine-Italian painter Lucio Fontana stands in the ruins of Jaar's old studio.

As curator, Burcu Fikretoğlu demonstrated an able talent for the creation of meaning through the connection of objects, and the space between them. By doing so, she also points to the spatiality inherent in objects themselves, not just in terms of their provenance but how they might be imagined to move, and sound. A series of sculptural works by Stefania Strouza, *433 Eros* (2022), is scattered throughout the gallery, instilling their meteor-like shape with the idea that they float, or land, haphazardly, from the moon, or some celestial phenomena. Strouza's work, and their careful curation, sets the show on a romantic plane, lunar, otherworldly, under a night sky sparkling with light, myth, vision, mystery. With the name of Leonard Cohen echoing, subtly, in the backdrop of every thought as the first hall opens wide behind a thick, heavy pair of red curtains and single bulbs cast their soft, moody light. A trio of canvases titled, *Curtain Romanticism* (2021-2022) is lathered with acrylic and etched with pencil by Kostis Velonis, repeating the imagery of the entrance with its formal semblances.

In through the immediate room, the trailer to a film by Claire Denis plays on repeat, as does an eerie succession of notes on piano. The musical phrasing is drawn from a recording of Cohen's *True Love Leaves No Traces*, although its alternate interpretation is on a more gloomy tone than the triumphant original. Denis' *L'Intrus* (2005) projects images of a man in need of a heart transplant, as he is stripped of exterior facade and plunges into the soil and forests of abandonment in search of his living, and perhaps everlasting, self. The visual motifs of remote desperation in the film fly past, in utter contrast to the fixed sculpture hanging on the opposite wall by Necla Rüzgar. The piece, *My Body Palace* is from a series in which she employed bronze casting to depict an antlered deer, its face flickering in the firelight of the movie, as its bushy neck fur covers a human portrait, downcast, glancing to the side, as if ashamed. If the relationship between nature and humanity is being painted by Fikretoğlu's curatorial work, it is broken, full of painful memories and the need for reconciliation.

The gleaming, metallic eyes of the deer stare directly into an adjacent room, where a new installation by Hale Tenger floats like the wafting of a dewy, floral scent in some familiar pastoral landscape. And with the repetitive chordal exclamation heard about its floating drapes and windblown transparency, the kinetic sculpture of silk fabrics suggests a cubist evocation of the ribcage in which the heart rests, and flutters, in the presence of art, life and love. The work of Tenger adds a warming, welcoming aura.

And leading through into a more brightly lit space, there are traces of domesticity, of civilization and its discontents, in the words of Sigmund Freud. Across from its doorless entry, there are adaptations of intricately carved wooden furniture, the likes of which might be expected in such a classy flat as that occupied by Galerist. The clothes drawers are sliced, as it were, so that they are legless, and appear to sink into the ground, quite like the old churches of Mexico City, as their foundations disappear into the eroding wetland earth. One of the more evocative works in the brightest of interior halls at *True Love Leaves No Traces* are a couple of photographs by Silva Bingaz, the first of which is titled, *Istanbul and its Painters* (2018-2022). The piece frames a multiple exposure of someone enduring a bout of excruciating night terrors, the heart of the city being an apt metaphor, visualized, for the confines of desire at the core of urbanization and its complex of aspiration in confrontation with the double binds of dream and reality.

*Istanbul and its Painters* depicts what it is like when the city maintains psychological sway over its protagonists, and assumes the role of lead character, controlling those who would have once sought to use it for their designs. Its madly Byzantine sophistication, blending social tension and industrial technology, are, at times, too much for a single individual to even fathom, never mind exploit. A Medusa-like visage of snaking locks of hair is fixed on the wall beside the image, created by artist Ismene King to capture such a mythic bearing.

And wrapping around through the inner passages of Galerist, cloaked in heavy curtains, red and thick, double-layered, as if behind the scenes of a Shakespearian set, the last room is an ode to the Fibonacci sequence of the snail's shell. Aestheticized by Velonis, whose concrete mixed media sculpture, titled, *The Wheel of Fortune (Corner Soul)* (2016), complements a single-channel video, *If and Only If* (2018) by Anri Sala. The moving image of a violinist playing softly in tune with the movements of a snail on his bow is hypnotic.

Overall, the curatorial collectivization of artworks at the exhibition, *True Love Leaves No Traces* considers the theme of romance as a picture of tempestuous yearning and unrequited passion between the naiveties of the natural world and the unwitting horrors that follow from the ecological footprint of humanity. As Cohen might have sung, these traces are best extinguished by the irresistible sway of forgetfulness, a call to oblivion that heals the traumatic wonders of fully conscious attachment to anything alive in the ephemeral universe.

February 22, 1:33 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Lens

The artist Selim Süme stood in the whitewashed apartment gallery of Versus Art Project to greet a few travelers who had wandered in on a bright Saturday afternoon. He spoke clearly, and in many words, about his series of photographs, which, according to his praxis, are about as significant as his chosen medium, namely the retro camera that he employed to create the overexposed images. His aesthetic, altogether purposeful, is one of lurid spectra, in which faces, walls and objects are cast in the artificial flash of mechanical instantaneity.

The people who were listening to him had not planned that they would see the artist. They had only come to see the art. But, without his explanation, it is not sure how much of the art they would have seen. His work bears a kind of painfully close familiarity, something that prods at childhood reminiscences of domestic space, especially for those who formed their earliest memories in the 1980s and 1990s when the snapshot was a newfangled curiosity, overused and subject to crops and lightings that are imperfectly beautiful and all but lost.

In an age defined by crystal clear images, produced ad infinitum, as people pose and linger with frozen smiles and a slight bend of the knee, evoking classical Greek's sculpture's break from their ancient Egyptian progenitors, Süme's unsettling, seemingly haphazard photography comes as a welcome catharsis. Their curation as fine art, however, might demand a peculiar stretch of the historical imagination from such passersby as would grace the floor of an inner-city art gallery in the heart of Istanbul.

But, to his credit, Süme was thinking of his son, who he framed in one piece, with the rambunctious child ostensibly involved in a game of hide-and-seek. He wanted his photos to have an informal air, for their prints to be palpable as they hang loosely against the wall of Versus Art Project, gently waving in the breeze of a weekend respite from a cold, late winter. His guests were from Eastern Europe, and asked about his opinion when it came to comparing Istanbul's art galleries from Vienna's, where Süme resides.

Süme responded by saying that, in Austria, there is a different color scheme to certain contemporary art spaces, almost as if they are more interested in decoration, whereas in Turkey there is a haunting political consciousness that affects a deeper, more psychological pull into the inheritance of popular metaphor, multigenerational stories preserved by symbols so as to safeguard their messages and tellers. And so inspired, his exhibition refers to a poem by the living, Izmir-based author Ahmet Güntan.

In one of his best-known works, which might be loosely translated into English as *Fragmentary Raw Manifesto* (in Turkish, *Parçalı Ham Manifestosu*), the poet advises his readers to use the image to inform. He also says not to send secret messages, that readers should not need added hardware. These principles can be said to apply to Süme's photographs, which are as they appear, blatantly flat in their dimensions. In conversation, Süme referred to miniature, or premodern painting, to explain his full-frontal portraits and use of shadow.

While suffering a lockdown, he found an outmoded digital camera and started clicking. He shot family members candidly, and the inside of the house with blatant, directness. All of the pieces are untitled. In one work, an older woman is about to bite on a piece of fruit. Her pale skin and gray hair is accentuated by the garish light. There is no perspective. It is almost difficult to look at, but for its unwavering gaze, absolutely forward. He is not hiding anything, not even the mess of wires that lay in a coiled mess on his plush carpet.

In one photo, he trained his sights on the uncovered arm of a person, their face out of the frame. Although they had rolled up their sleeve, the fact that they're wearing heavy, winter clothes suggests a cool climate. It could have been either Istanbul or Vienna. On their finger, gleaming in the light, is a ring, perhaps a wedding band. The lack of any semblance of immediately identifying qualities gives some of his images a semi-abstracted quality, a kind of postmodern neo-impressionism in photography.

One of his works is almost entirely abstract, its large-format print exposed to the point of sheer whiteness, while emanating a warm orange light and a band of purple fading into the vanishing borders of an image that may have once captured the surface of a counter, or the end of a desk. When juxtaposed, as curated, beside a smaller photograph of someone's shoulder, with a more even exposure, the sense of scale becomes important. Süme noted that the whole process of developing the pictures was nostalgic, and fired his creativity.

Among the largest of prints is a flash-photography shot of a stuffed animal, a monkey, its beady black eyes looking back into the camera with the inanimate cuteness of the object, as if drawn from a memory. By spending more time with his family, particularly his son, and returning to aspects of his childhood, Süme has done what artists should arguably do, exhibiting not only their works, but that which humanizes them as they've become artists, and while making art; a bold, courageous act of vulnerability in dialogue with others.

Versus Art Project is an independent space that has shown an interesting number of series by photographers from Turkey, namely Yusuf Murat Şen and Metehan Özcan, both of whom have a resonance with Süme in their works. Whereas the photographs of Şen explore vintage themes going back to the roots of photographic technology, Özcan has also focused his practice on architectural interiority, albeit with a more Düsseldorf style à la Candida Höfer.

Süme has conveyed a naivety in his show, *Transit*, which, as a professional artist and in reference to the art world, might be endearing, but the question remains of whether the involuntarily prolific mass of universally public photographers will respond to it with the same idiosyncratic charm that he imbued in his very personal works. Theory aside, *Transit* is an image-weary artist's pandemic notes on how the past was once seen when it was present.

March 4, 11:43 AM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Duo

What can be said about the sale of art painting in the late winter of 2022 will be about as interesting and important as the words that will be used to describe them. The series of unframed canvases by artists Mert Diner and Olcay Kuş at Art On Istanbul seem to clash with late modernism and its postmodernist relative, as the two movements grappled with the meaning and role of public appreciation when it comes to culture, visual literacy and the advancement of craft, concept and aesthetic.

From Rothko to Warhol, Basquiat to Banksy, the envelope of art world institutionalization has been pushed to the extreme and that unfolding is a matter of pleasure for contemporary artists in Turkey, who enjoy a particularly comfortable historical and geographical distance from the ostensible centers of cultural progress, as they have moved and shaken from New York to London, Paris to Berlin. Yet, with a naivety, young painters like Diner and Kuş still sing the gospel of what was once hot, now cool, with refreshing sincerity.

If there is anything that art might suffer from it is its passion for authenticity, a constant, almost obsessive fixation with how to define itself in terms of reality, perhaps comparable to the erratic shifts in millennial identity politics as checked by those alive who cannot forget the twentieth century and its dizzying disarrays of multiple popular dissonances. And in the heart of Istanbul, Diner and Kuş are remembering a few unfaded traces of creative innovation, of how to see the world, to remake its fancies, reconsidering perception as a bias of perspective.

The difference would be, then, for example, whether someone is inside, or outside of a brick-and-mortar establishment, or, with reference to the Cold War and its unruly persistence, on which side of the wall. It would appear, then, in the greater contexts in which *Eye Level*, the exhibition at Art On Istanbul, is situated in time and space, that Diner and Kuş continue to pioneer the wrecking ball fantasy of certain street artists and diehard modernists to live and work at the core of salability, marketing their underlying ideas of youth communalism.

With improvisational bursts of black graffiti lines, traced like a man on the run, a piece of acrylic and spray paint on canvas by Diner entitled, *Half way* (2018) is, as its name suggests, halved into the flagrant spaciousness of a common field, such as a concrete slab standing upright on a sidewalk. It triggers thoughts of the inveterate modernists of paint and its opposites, such as Robert Rauschenberg, specifically his work, *Untitled (glossy black painting)* of 1951, which bears an uncanny resemblance to a whole wave of monochrome artists. Diner's oil and spray paint painting, *There might be something in there* (2018) has a classic abstract expressionist look.

The drive to bring the street into the gallery or museum was recently foregrounded in Istanbul by Arter, during the group exhibition, *Precaution*. Like the attitude of street culture, from muralists to sculptors, mosaicists and painters, Art On Istanbul is prompting a collaborative tone with *Eye Level*. Its title is a metaphor for evenness opposed to the elitism that stereotypes artists and their industries. By mixing and matching their artists in arresting ways, instead of strengthening the

brutal competitiveness between fellow creatives, showing two painters whose works bear a number of similarities and resonances in their techniques and biographies is a welcome gesture.

In an age when professional artists are looking forward to a post-pandemic life when capitalist work is seen as increasingly outmoded in favor of independent workplaces and personalized schedules, the amalgamation of the modern with the contemporary is an apt occasion to bring together the works of two artists whose works are in dialogue. That being said, paintings by Kuş maintain a style that is utterly distinct from Diner, closer to pop art with their vivid colors and use of letters, approaching cartoonish representationalism.

As in Diner's works, Kuş encompasses conflicting aesthetic techniques within the frame of his canvases. In one piece, an acrylic collage with spray paint and ink on paper, *Untitled* (2021), there is a rectangle of a painting within the painting, its colors and shapes altogether unique from that of the abstraction behind it. In an iconic piece of his from the show, *Boom* (2018), he, again, used acrylic, spray paint, collage and ink on paper to affect a graffitied sensibility, as if he had tagged his own materials.

In her catalog essay for the show, Deniz Kırkalı needed material, as she opened with a nonchalant vision of her walking, thinking, on the way to meeting Diner and Kuş. Instead of discussing the artists after encountering them and their work, as most writer-curators would do quite immediately, she reflected on the road that led her to them, how, in the bustle of Istanbul, she attempts, whether consciously or not, to narrow the influx of sights that seem to force themselves upon her, and everyone who passes by.

The point that Kırkalı raised attempts to focus perceptive consciousness on what meets the eye, without any added effort, the natural course of sight while simply moving, on foot, through the urban jungle. It is curiously fascinating to imagine her route as she entertains the habits that she has formed going from one place to another. In her mind, the city becomes an architecture of memory, something out of Calvino, or in her referencing, the French philosopher Luce Irigaray, whose writings on intersubjectivity overlapped with the personal words of Kırkalı, the art painting of Diner, Kuş, and potentially everyone who truly looks at what they are seeing.

March 9, 4:12 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Women

In place of visibility, there is a crowd. It is more like a mass and moves across the sky, at times hanging low to the ground, where it slows down and is called fog to those who pass through it, at a loss for where they might have planned to go. But from above, to those who fly, it might not look very different from the land itself, a natural emergence of air from the soil, as its elements commingle and create the texture of Earth.

The metaphor of cloud cover, as seen from above and below, concerns the curation of historical artwork from a gender perspective in the context of seeing the show, *I-You-They: A Century of Artist Women* at Meşher, where leading ladies on the first floor, such as abstract expressionist painter Fahrelnissa Zeid and Turkey's first female professional photographer Yıldız Moran hold a canonical presence alongside peers, antecedents and successors.

Zeid's oil on canvas *Resolved Problems* (1948) pushes the envelope of the exhibition's ambitious timeline near to its conclusion. The work is abstract but calculated, her mosaic-like forms recall Byzantine culture, and the fragmentations of visual perception, conceived in an age which she presciently forecasted would be increasingly dominated by the saturated overpopulation of voices and works streamlined into corporate media.

All artists, whether they were men or women, who came into the world between the 1850s and 1950s, responded to an entirely different zeitgeist of perceptual discernment. When Zeid made *Resolved Problems* she was not so much revealing or obscuring, as much as she was showing obscuration itself.

That knack and intuitive grasp that Zeid exhibited was common among women who were expressing, however obliquely, the fact that they had been subjugated to less importance in the cultural historiography of Western art, and more so for being Turkish. Moran, the genius that she was, produced a trio of photographs, *Echo* (1952), blurring the self-examination of mirrored portraiture in a figure absorbed by her reflection to the point of subjective dissolution.

The liberal spaciousness of Meşher can offer particularly creative curatorial opportunity, such as when the *Beyond the Vessel* show exhibited Kim Simonsson's *Moss People* (2019), transforming one of its walls into an enchanted forest, or when it formerly housed Arter, and painter Can Aytekin's *Empty House* emphasized the absence of its architectural anomalies. *I-You-They*, however, succumbs to the regressive tendency to merely decorate.

There is a long overwrought debate on the lightness of being in art, on whether or not aesthetically engaged work can confidently kick up its feet and exist as mere decoration, or disembark from amusement-theme institutionalization into the deep waters of overlapping fields. And in walks feminism. After a long march from prehistory, when goddesses and the female form served as the inspiration for the earliest works of figurative art in the archaeological record, women confronted men on the soapboxes of fin-de-siècle society. Righteously, they were



frustrated over their displacement amid the rise of democracies led by working classes empowered to reform their governments, representative of human equality.

Their ideas were large, and so were their strides. Turkey stands out as having led a successful women's suffrage movement before many Western countries like France, Greece and Switzerland, although not without a few compromises to their overall electoral system. There is an oil painting on plywood at the show from that time, titled, *Girls Practicing Painting* by Emel Koruktürk, dated to the 1930s. Its impressionistic bent is rosy, if faceless.

That incipient era of Turkish feminism, as it might be remembered, had a parallel life in and among the pictures that women created before and in the midst of its burgeoning actions. But its beginnings toward a more enlightened republic of liberated women were not without awkward moments, considering the patriarchal background of Ottoman art history. A pastel on cardboard by Mihri Müşfik, born in 1885, is that of a self-Orientalist. *The Sultan's Favorite with Mirror*, follows familiar tropes, and Artun's often haphazard curation is not exactly critical. Müşfik, who lived wide awake and working through the Ottoman Empire's transition to the Republic of Turkey, showed a girl from the palace in the typical fashion. Like Moran's modernist woman, invoking a semblance of American artist Cindy Sherman, Müşfik's subject gazes away from the artist, and into a mirror. She is demure and half-dressed.

When placed next to a work of oil on hardboard by Semiha Berksoy, *Self-Portrait*, their divergent approaches to making art are clearly distinct. Müşfik was weighed by the lingering influences of Turkey's past, Berksoy was a daughter of the secular republic, who'd come to painting with the ecstatic joy and uninhibited expressionism, freed from the stage that made her name as she went back and forth between Turkey and Germany in the 1930s, famous as an independent, bohemian bon-vivant throughout her illustrious, eccentric career. But the temptations of the Orientalist were not entirely extinguished by the cold shower of modernism. That is patent at *I-You-They* in an untitled photograph by Semiha Es, whose globe-trotting adventures gleaned images from exotic locales, including that of a black woman draped in the fur of a big cat. It appears that she made the woman pose, as she lays facing the camera directly, exposing her forehead and chest, marked with ritual scarring.

In the final act of *I-You-They*, the top floor of Meşher's galleries is mobbed with a wall of paintings, drawings, manuscripts and other forms of artwork. Their attributions are heaped together in a long series of lists set apart from the art. The effect is disillusioning. If the idea of the exhibition was to inform and foreground women as central to Turkey's art history, it was a confusing balancing act, jumbled, as it were, in search of something more tangible than those names that are already canonical. But, if seen with a welcome naivety, and an open heart, it is still an opportune feast of visions in the name of so many, countless Turkish women who lived empowered lives as accomplished artists, uniquely important as ever.

March 17, 2:32 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Diversion

The cold, postcolonial shell of museum whiteness can be deadening to public morale in the face of worldwide calamity and local displacements, firming up the hard, infertile soil on which the cause of culture rests, as it were, in the eternal sleep of institutionalization, like a body flown out to deep space in a cryogenic cell, light-years away. The answer from leading, traditional establishments as the Louvre, Tate and the Met, has been to deaccession in response to international calls for the old Eurocentric guard to put down their shields and give back the treasures their colonialist forefathers stole.

And as masterpieces of art by the world's Indigenous Peoples art leave their vitrines and collections where they've enriched the wealthy, leisure classes who've relished in the fruit of their imperial acquisitions, a rage of artists has come to claim that empty space motivated to create new works and relations in the spirit of independence and occupation, to redirect the runaway train of civilization from collision to flight, within, and without the trappings of history. That is, in effect, where art comes in, as a discipline that, while not immune to the traumas of the past, serves as a bold and refreshing empowerment of the present moment.

An object, like a word, when completely on its own, is irrational in its perfect holism. Only in terms of connection, context, does meaning evolve. Later, semantic and semiotic value changes over time according to its usage, as is socially predicated. Any single thing, a word, an object, is unreliable, indefinable, unless it is acted upon. That inaction, however, and impracticality, has come to be a signpost for the definition of art, as exhibited in its various mainstream institutions. Museums, for example, are places of distance from objects and what images or concepts they represent, what media they abstract.

In some cases, performances bridge the gap between seer and what is seen. The idea of a performer, or actor, though, is open to interpretation, as the act of seeing is conditioned by the curation of the works. Direct interaction, then, is perhaps the last and most intimate step in the exhibition of art, before it cycles around back to collaboration, and the creative work of the artists themselves. This is a question that collectives have raised, especially considering the wave of social artwork that emerged out of societies on the fringes of Europe like Yugoslavia with the group Škart, and, of course, elsewhere.

Unexpectedly, to some, while obvious to others, the seemingly rigid bearings of Arter are home to a diversity of experimental visions with respect to art's relationship to general society, as it inspires its workers to engage with the general population, children and the working-class, so that they might let their worldly presumptions down, like their hair, and lighten up in front of a late-night game in the light of day. A piece by Swedish artist Jacob Dahlgren starts the show, *ThisPlay*, from the top down, curated with a taste for disparate resonance by Emre Baykal, as its readymade dartboards, combined together, form the likeness of a pop-art painting.

Dahlgren began his artistic work in abstract painting, incorporating geometric forms and everyday colors. A player might walk over to his work, *I, The World, Things, Life* (2007), and pick up five darts, and allow their mind to be subsumed by the visual field of concentric yellow and black circles. In an adjacent room, a reworked ping-pong table by George Maciunas, a key figure in Fluxus, is almost unplayable, its paddles stapled with bottle caps or topped with cleaning brushes. The subversion of logic for joy, the competitive wheels of capitalism for the square tires of parody, is arguably the chief *raison d'être* of the contemporary artist.

Arter, and Baykal's curations, in particular, are rife with references to the history of Fluxus, integrating works by pioneers like Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik into what appears to be a visible majority of its group shows. *ThisPlay* is no different, and encompasses a mass representation of artists way outside of the everyday local Turkish art scene, with a welcome turnout from less-traveled European countries like Finland, Iceland, Bulgaria and Serbia. That said, the show features characters who commonly reappear at the center of the art map in Istanbul, like Cevdet Erek, Deniz Gül, Leyla Gediz, Füsün Onur, Nilbar Güreş and others.

The surfacing of Onur's artwork demands a special highlight because she will be representing Turkey at the Venice Biennial of 2022, in an event that will be historically charged with post-pandemic fervor. The upwardly mobile bound to collect, and the stylish fixations of the global art crowd can expect to gawk in awe at the midcentury feminism of Onur, whose installations conjure the conceptualist fantasy of spatial reinvention, guiding perspective from individuality to mutuality with a liquid, aural aesthetic. If her last solo show, *Opus II - Fantasia*, at Arter, was intellectually opaque in its blankness, her work at *ThisPlay* is more approachable.

As a sly comment on durational art, and even performative action, Onur's eight-hour video, *Pink Boat* (1993 [2014]) begins when Arter opens, and ends when the elaborate building in Dolapdere closes. It is a subtle piece, demanding the kind of patience that is as rare in such a place for skittish human attention spans that are as wild as a jungle cat. But, imaginably, when the video came out in 1993, after Onur had already made a good name for herself, it is not entirely impossible that there were people who sat through the whole length of it, watching the strong currents and winds on the Bosphorus pass over a pink boat in its waters.

As a site-specific artist, Onur's video reflects the sense of time that museums condense as a voice-over plays on loudspeakers announcing intervals prior to its closure. Her other works are as uncanny, like *Water by the Sidewalk* (1981), a plexiglass collage of artificial spillage against the side of a wall, which is reminiscent of the tone in artwork by Ayşe Erkmen, her peer, whose piece, *Colours of Letters* (2006) is a childlike evocation of her career-long penchant for using plexiglass too, although tinted and often warped. There are a number of ladders in *ThisPlay*, with multicolored or missing steps, mirrored. Where they lead does not matter.

March 25, 1:52 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Post

Over the winter, Cemre Yeşil Gönenli had a sprawling work at Sakıp Sabancı Museum, as part of their show, *Past Present Istanbul*. Despite the name, the curation by Murat Germen was surprisingly inventive and relevant. It was also buoyed by a healthy representation of younger artists, such as Ege Kanar and Nora Byrne, whose installations spoke to the history and infrastructure of Istanbul, culturally and architecturally. Gönenli mined the medium of photography, particularly its archival history, for her piece, *Dream & Fact - A Handbook of Forgiveness and A Handbook of Punishment*.

*Dream and Fact* explored the late Ottoman era of Abdülhamid II, the sultan who is regarded as the last to preserve a source of political, imperial power in the palace, whose sway would fade from the shores of the Bosphorus, only to resurge among former subjects of the empire in the Anatolian plains of Ankara in the form of secular parliament. Gönenli traced the effect of the camera's lens, focusing on the hands of people in chains, leaving their heads to the seer's imagination. In turn, Gönenli pointed to an essential trait of photography, that its innate realism is as misleading as it is representative of human visual acuity.

Earlier in the year, around spring, Gönenli enjoyed the opening of her solo show, *Double Portrait*, at Milli Reasürans Gallery, in collaboration with art historian Ahu Antmen, who is a frequent presence in Istanbul's culture field. In the book publication that accompanied the prolific exhibition, Antmen wrote a brief, sensitive essay, entitled, *Fragments of Humanity in Cemre Yeşil's Double Portrait*. In it she, declared: "Photography here is an attempt at the articulation of human states, about how we struggle with existence itself." The work that went into *Double Portrait* offers an apt prelude to Gönenli's curatorial work at Mixer.

Under the title, *Change of Plans*, Gönenli invited twelve artist-photographers to reflect on their experience in the midst of the pandemic that changed everyone's lives, generally for the worse, whether they liked it or not. In the process, she has further defined her voice as a photography curator in reference to the art world and its demands to intellectualize and institutionalize personal creativity into forms of public communication, clearly consumable, as experiential commodities, if not for sale outright.

Gönenli goes against the current. She is an independent figure, who opened a cafe in Karaköy not far from Mixer, where fine baked goods are sold alongside photo books and books on photography. The books include everything from Susan Sontag's famous treatise on the medium to large-format coffee table tomes replete with full-color images displaying the shock and awe that the world's best photographers have ever instilled since the first capture of the moveable feast that is life within little explosions of metal, glass and light.

*Change of Plans*, at Mixer, is very much streamlined within the framings of her taste, bearing her technical mark on almost every corner of its photographic representations, only departing, perhaps, where the show includes multimedia installations. But it is not transcendent. To an

everyday seer who might have tracked more than a few hours prowling the art map of Istanbul and other highly exposed international cities, there is something holding it back even where it lurches forth, baring bodies when it could have born ideas.

If the underlying theme of the show was to uncover the anxiety of millennials who took refuge in the diversions of their smartphones, the exploitations of the Internet and the ubiquity of photography during the height of pandemic restrictions, it was decidedly open, outward and extroverted in its mood, which had no perceivable unity other than a sheer aesthetic consensus of wayward lighting and oblique perspectives, soft gestures and opaque environments. And from their lenses, so many eyes stare back, wondering why the silence is so loud.

Despite the infinite interpretability of near-abstract, decontextualized imageries, *Change of Plans* has a rawness, almost flesh-like, although obscured by the density of overlapping technologies, the dimming of points of unadulterated human view before the all-encompassing void of lockdown law and its iron hammer of authority. While time seemed to stop like the click of a shutter, those who were in certain stages of their lives were forced to play a kind of freeze tag, remaining where they were for as long as they could, or couldn't.

The first few frenzied glances at *Change of Plans* might include a glimpse of two fishes, one with its bulging lips against the forehead of another, as if they were kissing. The affectionate, tender portrayal of nonhuman beings acting like people triggers a sense that anyone might connect with these creatures, as they lack characteristics that might indicate class or culture. But eerily, the fish that is hanging its lips out has lost its eye. It is posed as a slight detail from an outside vantage point, even if utterly important to that being.

The picture of blindness, of a fish swimming in the dark of its own mind, is suggestive of human behavior in the face of that total mystery that awaits everyone every day, unaware of what might be lurking around the corner. The fact that Gönenli curated the show without texts to identify which work is whose, or their titles, gave the show an alternative otherworldliness that drives its mystical venture into the unknown. One of the benefits of youth, however, is not to be burdened with too much personal history.

But the era of the pandemic had the effect of clearing history while weighing the world's human population down with collective memory, with motifs that will be visual cues for as long as the twenty-first century remains fixed to its prevailing epochal definitions within the course of civilizational development. As Gönenli has curated, and in her works, though, she is brushing shoulders with history but showing that photography is not merely a utility for record-keeping, but an association of more spiritual evocations, of the human experience, as the soul of memory, even portals through which to transcend the ties that bind bodies to time.

March 29, 2:38 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Bodily

Clay has often been a hard sell in the art world. It's generally relegated to a medium of craft in which the primacy of technique over ideation renders it irrelevant to much of the curatorial, postmodernist status quo. But even at the roots of the avant-garde, ceramicists and potters, workers of clay, glazes and kilns, have ever stood, aright and poised to take on what they've conceived of as the present moment of creativity, with its cyclical, prehistoric memory intact.

That can be true for Beatrice Wood, for example, a confidant of Marcel Duchamp who lived out the end of her long life firing stellar assortments of pots. And it is a medium that has taken on newsworthy import with the arrival of Simone Leigh, representing America at the Venice Biennial for its 2022 openings. In Turkey, ceramics have a special resonance within the local cultural spheres of its domestic geography.

From the wares of Kütahya to the Iznik tiles that are almost an automatic signature of Turkish design, traditional to contemporary, the artistry of clay came to assume an inventive spell of resurgence as part of the modernist canon with the work of Füreyâ Koral, who tended toward large-scale, painterly panel displays that now grace the walls of many historical buildings in Istanbul.

Born in 1936, Candeğer Furtun developed her work with a certain renown by the 1960s, when Koral would come to be known by the name we know of, reputed, fabled, as she broadened out her fantastically earthy, but skyward palettes to entrance the public while entertaining the upper crust of midcentury Turkish society. As a ceramic muralist, Koral gleaned inspiration from her time in Mexico, after a stint in the United States. Furtun also worked in America, specifically in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts, not far from the metropolitan region of Boston. It was there amid the rural forests of New England where she honed her singular vision for sculptural aesthetics, beyond the ceramic paintings of Koral or the full assumption of traditional pottery by Alev Ebüzziya Siesbye, another of her early contemporaries who recently enjoyed a solo show at Arter's museum space in Istanbul's Dolapdere neighborhood.

In 1963, Furtun had followed through with an apprenticeship program at a modest site known as "Craft Center" in Worcester. It was her solo exhibition and sale, and curiously read, *One Man Ceramic Show*, running for two weeks that summer. At the time, she was producing beautiful vases that could have decorated any suburban home, their glazes pleasing and rustic, with brown tones, darkening and liquid.

At her Arter show, titled after her name, a platform in the middle of the first of two halls exhibits these kinds of works. Her utilitarian pitchers and teapots, bowls and plates, jugs and the like are an exception to the rule of her formal abstraction that, by means of repetition, focused on the limbs of the body foremost, as her chief subject. Facing the bustling traffic, Arter's curation by Selen Ansen is a minimalist chorus of legs and arms, cast as clay. Shield-like and with a classical Grecian sensibility, they are suspended along the walls, flexing their exact likenesses. The

repetition itself increases in strength, it would appear, by the volume of its enumeration. As an answer to the demands of the mechanical world order, perhaps, Furtun answered with fragmented manikins of humanity, quartered. A series of a dozen pieces titled *Arms* (1994) are identically proportioned.

The human form has ever been at the center of art. In Turkey, however, the depiction of people has been controversial due to certain customary restrictions when it comes to the divide between the public and private spheres. Generally clothed when they might have been the subject of more detailed study, the body in early modern painting and sculpture is marked by a vastly different precedent in the Turkish milieu.

The legacy of Furtun, and the import of her retrospective, come to seers in the mid of an ongoing reconciliation with the cultural heritage of a population gripped by such a situation. Overall, in her practice, it appears that Furtun is relocating self-perception back to the body, placing it within a hall of mirrors in which only it and itself exists.

In her other series, such as *Depar* (1988), which translates as “Start,” Furtun shows the likeness of a human figure crouching. But she does not slough off the cast that surrounds its headless form, flattening out into valleys and plains by the spatial highlands of its legs, back and arms. The effect is that of someone emerging from under the earth, a resurrection, then, of the human being, reborn, reclaimed within the personal history of the artist, and her collective.

There are many tubular, cylindrical works, mostly untitled, that look like tree trunks, likely reflective of the process of making pottery on a wheel, which creates an upsurge of wet soil that must then be pressed down and fanned out to make a bowl or cup. But instead of utilizing the practicalities of the age-old craft, she stops at their foundations, either by the first upward momentum, or toward flat, almost papery formations.

Out of many smooth, horizontal works, there are emanations of anonymous portraits, bursts of ghostly profiles. Some of them, she titled, *Faces* (1979-1980). Others appear to be in the form of leaves and clovers, according to their titles. But their semi-abstract formations could evoke any number of naturalist definitions, such as a lily pad, or, in some cases, a part of the human body, conveyed with the gentle fragility of the flesh itself.

In that sense, Furtun offers only the very dedicated seers of her work something of an artistic environmentalism, as she humanizes the earth, showing its basic medium as a body of bodies, whereas mostly exploited for practical use, then, in her hands, bearing a superfluous, but equally essential aesthetic of life, as lived, not as a means to an end, but as the total joy of every note in a piece of music; the entire process of creating an artwork, or the embodiment of a person whose parts, even together, do not encompass the magic of their wholeness.

April 4, 5:11 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Stillness

As a teenager at the end of the 1990s, Aykan Safoğlu walked to Istanbul High School, passing the *Workers' Monument* in Tophane Park. Erected in 1973, the sculpture had a decidedly communistic poise, its muscular, masculine figure holding a hammer. In those days, the metaphorical sickle was not a far cry north as the crow flies across the Black Sea. Its artist, Muzaffer Ertoran, had intended the public piece to be a permanent show of solidarity for the over one million guest workers who had then emigrated from Turkey to Germany since 1961.

Due to a global oil crisis, 1973 was the last year of that official migrant work agreement, but as many sixtieth anniversary initiatives showed in 2021, its effects on both German and Turkish society, their multicultural demographics and international politics, are perhaps one of the most impactful in all of Europe, comparable to that of Algerians in France. Not because of its neoclassical Grecian, almost fascistic aesthetic à la Arno Breker, Ertoran's sculpture ceased to exist by 2016 on account of vandals.

As Safoğlu passed by the *Worker's Monument* in Tophane, which stood tall in front of the Karabaş Mustafa Ağa Mosque facing the cafes of Karaköy, he took mental snapshots and has since revived it as part of his work, *Reunion* (2022), which is made of puzzle pieces. Splayed and scattered on the floor of Salt Galata's underground gallery, the work bears traces of his cognitive dissonance, as an eyewitness to the loss of art and memory. The backstory, riveting and relevant, demands a second reading following the mere fragmentation of its image.

After graduating from Istanbul High School, Safoğlu joined the waves of immigrants who have continued to make for the flatland equity of the German socioeconomic promise that so endears the world to its surgically maneuvered postwar state of capitalist success, if only within European moderation. His own story of flight and integration as a foreign national is mirrored in his approach to the conceptual basis of photography, how the evocation of still life is a reflection of movement, not objectively in space, but subjectively in time.

Entering the clean, bare, even stark hall of Salt Galata's basement exhibition space, austere in its emptiness, the glare of its ceiling lights conjuring its lock-and-key ambiance as a former Ottoman bank vault holding the debt of an empire on the brink of default, a large-scale artwork by Safoğlu hangs suspended on a powder-coated steel structure as part of his *Recess*. With digital prints on strips of wallpaper, the piece *Zero Deficit (In Refusal)* (2020) is a mesmerizing, stereoscopic venture through the grandiloquent collage of national and scholastic bureaucracy.

Safoğlu challenges the linearity of records, specifically that of Germany and its education system, in which the artist navigated the graphs, rulebooks and coordinates of its institutional authority. His voice as an artist is clear throughout the show, which goes between semi-abstract decor and sociological visualization much in the way of the late twentieth-century German artist K.P. Brehmer, but the underlying concepts can be opaque, generally speaking, requiring the



preparatory homework that local curators like Marcus Graf ask the public to entertain before traversing through the spatiality of its inferred references.

For example, the work, *Angelus Novus* (2022) is silk-screen on hologram paper. Through the practically subconscious resonance of its rainbow spectrums that dance in harmony with the steps of the seer, Safoğlu considers the gesture of a photograph as a chorus of primary elements, which, by their natural motion within a frame, might convey the longings and passions of migration. Beside it, *Depeche Mode* (2022) is slightly more prosaic, reminiscent of high school in the 1990s, its music internalized over analog playback buttons.

Increasingly apt as critical social commentary, Safoğlu's work, *decrescendo* (2022) culminates toward the production of what he calls "migrant images." The notion that traces of the mechanical imagination might be circumscribed within the human narrative of migration is a common thread in many contemporary artists' approaches to the idea of provenance or the sources from which things and theories are derived. Among them is Michael Rakowitz, whose food-wrapper mosaics perform the magical act of making lost Iraqi archaeology reappear.

In the series, *decrescendo*, framed with aluminum and made translucent through a process of silk-screening, Safoğlu centers on personal items, a passport, a medical document and a pair of basketball sneakers. They are, as its title signifies, the visual echoes of one among so many young people in Germany, uprooted from Turkey, their bodies absent from what remains of their youth. Safoğlu's reflexive research-heavy piece recalls an installation by DiasporaTürk, *Passport* (2021), which examined Germany's racist paperwork for Turkish guest workers.

The backdrop and veritable centerpiece to Safoğlu's exhibition conclude the series, *The Sequential* at Salt, programmed by curators Amira Akbıyıkoglu and Farah Aksoy to evoke the special motifs that have encompassed the lives and artworks of senior millennials among the Turkish art world, including its diasporas and far-flung inspirations.

From a lonely, pandemic-stricken Beyoğlu apartment in the filmmaking of Volkan Aslan, to an Emirati construction site readapted into Deniz Gül's writerly imagination, the postmodern Levantine archaeology of Barış Doğrusöz, and a regression to Ottoman intellectualism by Fatma Belkıs and Onur Gökmen, and countless other manifestations of creative witnessing, *The Sequential* finishes strong with a video essay by Safoğlu, on his experience with institutionalization through education and immigration in Germany.

In his twelve-minute film, *Dog Star descending* (2020), Safoğlu tracks a succession of images across the lens of the camera, and as they pass, ever so deliberately, his voiceover recounts his memories from school. "When mom first visited me in Berlin," he says, "We both went to visit Haydıca, a Greek relative from Istanbul." In the background, the sole of an upturned shoe is stained, as spliced printouts of photos bear the traces of family encounters.

Safoğlu personalizes the multigenerational trauma of the guest workers' generation and its effects on him, as a young man whose mind is weighed by an inheritance, not of monetary funds but of historical oppression. And he suffers too, as a contemporary artist sensitive to the psychological ruins of the past. His piece is a meditation on the repercussions of international relations, and the compression of time from a modern perspective.

“I ask myself if everything would have been different if the two Prussian warships hadn't been integrated into the Ottoman fleet,” he ponders, as a photograph of what appears to be him flashes across the projected screen, his face straining for a touch of innocence behind clear tape and strips of paper, recombined through an awkward, but captivating reconfiguration of light and darkness. The struggle to see, to understand his story through those around him, through the places he's lived in, is palpable, as familiar and strange as looking in the mirror.

April 7, 12:30 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Framing

He was late, but not fashionably. Just late. Late for the best party of the century, that creative revolution of early twentieth-century modernism that turned aesthetics into concepts, decoration into experience, and individual identity into the universal fluidity of life, lived as one dissonant chorus of introspective social butterflies who loved art more than artists, or sometimes the other way around.

Abdülmeccid II suffered the pangs of isolation, confined to lavish, palatial quarters before emerging from the fog of Abdülhamid II's era to embrace Turkey's young secular thinkers even while he himself represented the anachronisms of a country blazing toward Westernization. It is clearest in his painting. He was an ardent Francophile, the son of Abdülaziz, the very first sultan to travel through Europe on a diplomatic mission.

The court at Dolmabahçe Palace was friendly to Western intellectuals, a place where painters like Charles Chaplin could let their hair down, or at least put down their brushes. The exhibition at Istanbul's Sakıp Sabancı Museum (SSM) includes one of his exemplary works, entitled, *May Roses*, an oil on canvas that depicts a pale-skinned woman, her blouse tucked under her chest, holding a cerulean blue folded fan, her brunette hair tied up to reveal her blushing face.

Abdülmeccid Efendi, as he was known, by title, copied Chaplin's painting, which remains in Turkey's National Palaces Painting Collection. Acquired by the Ottomans in 1875, the canvas effectively parted the Red Sea of conservative mores amid changing social attitudes that understood that the path to modernization demanded adjustments, not only to the economic and military policies of the increasingly fringe imperial power, but to its sociocultural affairs.

As part of its many, multimedia angles, opening windows and pulling curtains to display the facts of Abdülmeccid Efendi's story, the sweeping curation at SSM also screens a documentary detailing the times in which the man was born, chronicling his rise from the hapless boy of deadly palace politicking, averting the fratricidal whims of succession to the enviable if decadent throne, to his assumption as crown prince.

When it comes to his mark in the annals of the Ottoman legacy, Abdülmeccid II is famous for being the last caliph of the old Turkish dynasty that claimed direct descent from the council of men who had presided over the house of Islam after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. During the enthronement of the final sultan, Vahideddin, a young, mustachioed Abdülmeccid II is standing with his back straight, opposite Talat Pasha and Enver Pasha, who ruled de facto.

Behind the scenes, there was a changing of the guard, and arguably, nobody realized it as intimately from within the center of Ottoman power as Abdülmeccid II, who, by his letters, and his lifestyle, exuded solidarity with his pro-Western confidants. But history was not on his side, and despite his patronage of secular literati from Istanbul to Ankara, his lifelong passion for French easel painting, and love for the canonical music of the West, he was fated to exile.

It is said that just before Abdülmecid Efendi left his palace residence, bound for Switzerland, and later France, never to return to his native land again, denied the honor of a burial in Turkey, he signed one of his paintings. Although he took up the staff of the caliphate with pride, and an honorable sensibility for ethical leadership, leading his people, like his father, into a new dawn of global comportment, he was, at heart, an artist.

On entering the picture galleries where the broad oils of Abdülmecid II have been curated with delightful nuance by Nazan Ölçer, there is an immediate work, painted in 1904, entitled, *Entrance of the Istanbul Port*. It is the perfect greeting to the show, as its wide, glowing perspective of the city's storied historic peninsula, is seen, it appears, from a boat in the middle of the Bosphorus somewhere not far from the pier of Ortaköy.

*Entrance of the Istanbul Port* exhibits the technical grasp of Abdülmecid II, whose prowess for landscape, still life and portraiture integrated the lessons he learned from some of the greatest masters of the proper, uppish French art salons. Their sense of direction, while already gray according to outmoded nineteenth-century trends, remains vivid nonetheless, especially during a moment in the art world where invisible, conceptual naivety eclipses beauty for truth.

Abdülmecid II was a Romantic with a capital R. He might have admired the poetry of John Keats, the subject of a new biography, who is best known for his phrase, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." But beyond the haughty fin-de-siècle cafes of Paris, where subjectivity in art was beginning to reach avant-garde extremes, Abdülmecid II used his paintbrush to capture the superficial charm of his urban environment.

Interestingly, on one side of *Entrance of the Istanbul Port*, there is a steaming commercial cargo ship. The advent of modernism had brought with it the industrial excesses that define the prevailing zeitgeist. The steamer is vibrant with sunlight, as if it were one with the total energy of the Earth's closest star. Meanwhile, in the foreground, a rowboat bobs in the rough strait, its waves rising higher than the fragile vessel.

The message of his painting, *Entrance of the Istanbul Port* is clear. Modernity and Westernization were coming for Turkey, whether the residents of Istanbul liked it or not. A more powerful infrastructure of technological mass was arriving to claim global treasures amid the final gasp of antique imperial colonialism, before the checks and balances that would ensue in the face of World War I.

All throughout the multiple halls at SSM, the music of Abdülaziz, Abdülmecid II's father, plays from overhead speakers. It was likely these compositions that rang throughout the elite Ottoman painter's head while he made his art, played his piano and entertained friends like the poet Tevfik Fikret, in whose name he dedicated his painting, *Fog*, after Fikret's political poem by the same name.

With oils and verse, Fikret and Abdülmecid II were sounding their voices in the cause of humanist freedom. They had been oppressed under the reign of Abdülhamid II, and as Fikret poeticized, “Once again a stubborn smoke envelops your horizons...,” so, a harmony came through the painting of Abdülmecid II. A single raft fades into a whiteout seascape, as the sun fights to burn through the thick clouds, its glow reflecting on the water, guiding passengers into the blank, unpainted unknown.

April 21, 12:43 PM  
Istanbul, Turkey

## Caucasian

The most famous artist from the republic of Georgia was a rustic country fellow whose death in 1918 coincided with the independence of the nation that had wrested its freedoms from the Russian empire, only to be annexed by the Soviets in 1921. But those three years were preceded and followed by waves of creativity among poets and painters, friends and enemies who charged ruthlessly over the edge of history, balancing on that precipice known as modernism, its revolutionary aesthetics confounding all sense of time and place.

The unmistakably brilliant, magical surrealist canvases of Niko Pirosmani adorn the walls of the heady establishment on Rustaveli Avenue, the main artery in Tbilisi. In the bustling Central Asian capital, lofty examples of nineteenth-century architecture open to galleries enriched by such naive genius as that which has given the modest Caucasus country its unique character, a visual signature among contemporaries. His oils recall that of Marc Chagall and Paul Gauguin, and spread out into adjacent, high-ceilinged rooms beside the artworks of his peers.

In 1918, ecstatic by their newfound liberty, bristling with pride in their self-determination, painters frequented the art cafes of Tbilisi, and styled themselves like Parisians, Western as any Frenchmen on the town, out for a rout of cultural abandon. Pirosmani may have died that year, but he would be posthumously well-known. He'd lived in rural poverty. According to certain biographical depictions, he learned to paint by making signs on restaurants when not running a dairy shop surrounded by roadless hills and wayward herders.

In 2007, Istanbul's Pera Museum hosted a Pirosmani exhibition, naming him a legend in naive art, by that meaning, an autodidact, formally uneducated. But the age in which he lived was ripe for discovery as avant-garde intellectuals streamed into Tbilisi and its environs from Russian cities, crossing the mountainous land border that Georgia shares with its belligerent northern neighbor. At the National Gallery of Georgia, curators and art historians are hard at work contextualizing the art of Pirosmani within wider circles of early twentieth century creatives.

The makers and producers of art in newly independent Georgia, that was, during its initial era of national sovereignty, had confidently communistic airs, even if they would soon be overrun and supplanted by Bolsheviks. They formed unions, collectives, orders and groups, affirming their ideological consolidation not only among their Georgian brethren but also with Ukrainian poets, Russian progressives, any and all like-minded sort who shared their sense of direction on the canvas, the sculpture block, out of the studio and in life. Naturally, many burst into disagreements, dissolving their associations. In between organizing exhibitions, new factions formed. As early as 1877, the Fine Arts Society developed into the first School of Painting and Sculpture in 1901. But not until 1916, with the founding of The Society of Georgian Artists would modernists come together. Only, it was like herding cats, and they rarely hung on to formal institutionalization outside of their personal artistic training and the ways in which they rebelled against its rules and laws to make way for novel ideas.

Avant-garde artists, who took up the front of some of the more rarefied experimentation among modernists, did not make organizing any easier. In 1921, however, their Paris exhibition was a triumph. They included the beloved Lado Gudiashvili, Alexander Salzmann and others who represent pioneering artistic invention from Georgia a century past. One of the important modernist collectives was The Futurists' Syndicate, which had Kirill Zdanevich as a member. His art is now in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

The National Gallery of Georgia showed a number of his works for their recent show, *Georgian Modernism and Tbilisi Avant-Garde*, such as his pencil on paper drawing from the 1910s, entitled, *The Istanbul*. It is a graphic parallel to the cacophonous din that the then imperial capital of the late Ottoman empire would have conjured for one such as Zdanevich whose perspective was born of an increasingly urbanized, industrialized, Soviet takeover from the relatively pastoral scenography that Pirosmiani was crafting. Zdanevich infused his work with elements of advertising imagery, Cyrillic typographies, and nonfigurative abstraction.

Zdanevich had a brother, Ilya, who, as the National Gallery of Georgia historicizes, was quite a venturesome type, not only in his artwork, but in carrying the social significance of artists working together. After the breakup of The Futurists' Syndicate, he led the formation of another collective called "41 degrees" apparently because their native Tbilisi shares the same latitude with New York, Madrid, Naples and Istanbul, where their colleagues were breaking the rules of picture-making, while exploring pragmatic aesthetics with their modernist imagination. During their active years, the freewheeling avant-garde prompts to forego beauty and representation in painting, or meaning in poetry, in the interest of expressing the total awe of being through sound, color and action, captured the minds and hearts of Tbilisi's artists, as it did everyone who walked through its bohemian streets. But not all artists were so radical, and while based in Tbilisi, some stayed true to the more conventional leanings of the earlier group, "The Society of Georgian Artists," such as Georgian painter Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi.

In posterity, Sidamon-Eristavi enjoys renown as perhaps the first of theater designers in Georgia when plays were vehicles for unorthodox thinking. They were enacting their visions for the future, as it were, and employed the stoutest minds who were already deep in the waters of ideological distinction when it came to image-making. Sidamon-Eristavi in particular imbued landscapes with political and historical meaning. His series of small oils, *Erzurum, Etude*, painted while on the Ottoman-Russian front in 1916, details his skills as a keen observer. As early as the 1820s, the traveler and French consul Jacques François Gamba wrote: "Merchants from Paris, couriers from St. Petersburg, tradesmen from Constantinople, Englishmen from Calcutta and Madras, Armenians from Smyrna, or Yazd, Uzbeks from Bukhara – all would gather in Tbilisi during a day." In an academic study on Tbilisi's art history, *The Fantastic Tavern and Other Caucasian Stories* (1916-1921) scholar Maria Tsantsanoglu noted how the collective behind "41 degrees" was comparable to the dadaist scene in Paris.

April 27, 2:18 PM  
Tbilisi, Georgia

