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Cover by Ayse Wilson. Untitled, oil on canvas, 2019

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Editor's Note:

The fact that time keeps on trucking is just one of the hard truths in life, but what of it? Is there a way to slow it down, at least long enough to take a deep breath and imagine what if something else happened, or was happening. That's one of the essential powers of art and thought, to rebalance consciousness, all from within.

Human expression is naturally artistic, in that sense, as creativity is innate. That is something that Renan Koen wrote about in her book, "Positive Resistance" (2021), which I excerpted for this fourth issue of Fictive. In the context of her work enlightening young Turkish musicians to the horrors of the Holocaust, she has courageously sought a way forward through the riptide currents of ignorance that disaffect national communities from the histories they share with victims of mass displacement around the world, whether by force of multigenerational trauma or direct experience.

It is, at last, the first anniversary issue of Fictive. And after a year of independent efforts, the labor of love that has ensued is only brilliant for the luminaries who contributed. These pages are suffused with the poetry and art of people who have lived their lives in the spirit of originality, authenticity and holistic humanity.

In the flamenco fantasy of Canadian writer Tosh Hayashi, the European exile of Iranian modern dancer Sanaz Ghorbani, the sonnets of Boston poet Alex Butler, the drama of Istanbul graphic novelist Cem Özüdüru or the reportage of Cypriot photojournalist Eleni Papadopoulou, Fictive lives on.

Matt A.H. Oct. 27, 2021

Greek Blues by Nikos Ioannis



Dimitrios Semsis (lyra), Agapios Tomboulis (banjo) and Roza Eskenazi, the Smyrna Trio (Athens 1932)

It is Sunday afternoon in April, another late winter day in Calgary, Alberta, as sporadic snowfall lights on the sprawling residential landscape. A few blocks from the university in the northwest quarter of the city, one home opens its doors to lovers of Greek culture, ancient and contemporary. A neighbor walks down the road, on her way to the event, to show a bewildered downtown urbanite the way in a dizzying maze of suburbia. Host Karen Gummo greets at the door, a member-at-large of TALES, The Alberta League for the Encouragement of Storytelling.

The house concert event features Jennie Frost, selected in August 2012 by Storytellers of Canada / Conteurs du Canada as an Elder in Canadian storytelling, a prestigious recognition awarded only once a year. She then recorded for the STORYSAVE Project, which honors and preserves the oral storytelling traditions of Canada. Aboriginal, Irish and Canadian heritages are among the many recognized by Story Save storytellers. Frost, a classics scholar, published her first book, *The Courtship of Hippodameia* in 2005. Frost has performed stories for festivals, concerts, conferences, libraries and over one hundred schools in eight provinces and one territory since 1996. A 2-CD set of her work *Pygmalion and Other Greek Myths* was for sale at the event, along with her book.

The event did not begin with storytelling, however, but a *taksim*, a term and practice borrowed from other Middle-Eastern cultures meaning the improvisatory opening to a song in Greek music. Calgary Greek music band, Rembetika Hipsters were present to provide dynamic energy to the overall muse and meaning of story in the Greek tradition. Having toured much of Canada and Greece, the Rembetika Hipsters have released three successful CDs. The band continues to receive great recognition in Greece, especially for a video recording of their tenth anniversary concert in Calgary, where they played with a nine-piece ensemble. After performing the first song, bouzouki player and vocalist Nick Diochnos told one of his own personal stories, set during his Greek wedding in Athens, where he bought his first bouzouki with extra wedding money.

Rhythm guitarist and singer Allen Baekeland of the Rembetika Hipsters gave historical background and taught the meaning of the Greek band name. In the wake of the most significant and traumatic period in Modern Greek history, the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922), the Rembetika culture formed. The war, known as *The Catastrophe* by Greeks, led to the forced expulsion, or “population exchange treaty” of all Greek communities in Turkey, including the notable city of Smyrna. Over one million Greeks in Turkey were forced into exile. As a result, one in five people in Greece were refugees.

With their Turkish-influenced culture, vagrant impoverishment, drug use and outlaw mentality, refugee youth became what in Greek is known as *Manges*, loosely translated as hipsters. While very popular in the 1920s and 30s, the Rembetika music, likened to

American blues, was banned by government authorities. Nick explained that there are two connotations to the word, either it is used between buddies to denote camaraderie, or between parent and child as a means of castigation. Throughout many songs played during the course of the event, Nick would exclaim, “Hey Mange...Opa!”

With a repertoire of over a hundred songs, the Rembetika Hipsters played a diverse selection, not only of Rembetika songs, but also of Greek folk and popular songs. Two songs were especially poignant for their performance, as well as the stories that accompany. Firstly, they sung *Sto Perigiali To Krifo*, with music by legendary Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis in collaboration with Greek poet, and Nobel laureate, Giorgos Seferis. The work of Theodorakis, spanning from orchestral suites to popular tunes, has also been integral to the revitalization of Rembetika music into post-WWII popularity. Secondly, *Ta Pedia Tou Pirea* was sung in memory of Melina Mercouri, a Greek actress, singer and political activist, who sang the ode to the beauty of the Greek port town of Pireus in the film, *Never on Sunday*. The Rembetika Hipsters commented that the port town’s charm is actually a bit more of the rough than the diamond.

Jennie Frost captivated a silent crowd of about twenty keen listeners with stories from the ancient sagas of the Greek pantheon. Storytelling alternated with the music throughout the afternoon. Frost introduced her storytelling modus operandi with a short prefatory anecdote regarding her break from conventional academic interpretations. She gives ancient stories a refreshing new life. During her lively orations, she holds an elegantly crafted wooden cane, in homage to Indigenous traditions of the talking-stick. An elephant sculpture melts into an Ankh-shaped handle, in which are tied innumerable paper-crafted memorabilia from all of the communities she has visited to enlighten through the living tradition of oral storytelling.

With detail enough to craft the most intricate narrative, Frost weaves in and out of character dialogue and illustrates setting with the lithe energy of the overseeing deities she so magically conveys. One of her most memorably enchanting stories drew from Zeus, in relationship with his children, Hermes and Apollo. The visceral imagination of ancient Greek life, as in the story of Apollo’s maturation into his role as the god of music, knowledge and poetry evokes the divine majesty of creative human faculties. Hermes, who ultimately gifts Apollo his lyre in the story, becomes messenger of the gods, evincing respect for the underlying interconnectedness of all great worldly and divine phenomena into a harmonious narrative of familial interrelationships.

Frost told many stories, drawing not only from classical Greece. Her final story revealed a welcome gift for diverse cultural expression. Before reciting a quaint Chinese tale about a half-wit boy named Noodle, who eventually outsmarted the gentry of an ancient city

through a spirited affinity to poetic meter, Frost proclaimed to all her enthusiasm for epic storytelling sessions. For Frost, a five-hour long telling passes with sparkling enthusiasm. Nonetheless, Frost finished telling her last line on time to close the three-hour event, leaving all with a smile.

The Calgary cityscape glowed from the picture window behind the musicians and storyteller. The love of storytelling is a common root of social cohesion, yet the traditional arts of oral storytelling are too often ignored with similar cultural dissolution as seen in the disappearance of global language diversity. Storytelling, in the traditional and artistic forms of oration, is not simply a nostalgic reversion to childhood.

The lyrics of Giorgos Seferis speak with god-like insight and metaphoric clarity. Impermanent love, the hasty fool's rush to consummate young lust, is the subject of his poem Denial, better known as the song, *Sto Perigiali To Krifo*, sung by the Rembetika Hipsters. In a society dependent on non-renewable life sources, is the consumer resource paradigm of a young nation as Canada not also likened to a parable of the impermanent lust of young love? As Seferis writes in Denial:

On the secret seashore white like a pigeon
we thirsted at noon;

but the water was brackish.

On the golden sand

we wrote her name; but the sea-breeze blew and the writing vanished.

With what spirit, what heart, what desire and passion we lived our life: a mistake! So we changed our life...

[English translation by Edmund Keeley and Phillip Sherrard]

Oral storytelling roots people to an inner renewal of life, as innately creative, and in continuity with the most fundamental and longest standing traditions of humanity.

Nikos Ioannis is a Greek writer of Romaniote heritage

Istanbul Was A Musical by Pierre English



49th Istanbul Music Festival, courtesy of IKSv

I was there, before the winds changed, when a man could saunter down a cold, lonely alley under the shadow of a medieval tower and find himself welcomed among jazz lovers, sipping on a cold beer while basking in the proud sweep of Brazilian rhythms knocked out of the storied house piano at Nardis, as by Dan Costa and his quartet, kicked into high gear by the virtuosic and prolific Turkish drummer Ferit Odman. The two bubbled with chemistry one bold, innocent night in late October, 2019, when the world still cozied up to the idea of a future without the virus. Together with Tamer Temel on alto saxophone and Ozan Musluoğlu on bass, they rounded out familiar and exotic airs with solid backbeats pronouncing songs in the famed bossa nova and samba style, and lesser-known Latin tempos.

Costa played like a worker, fast absorbed in the complexity that only such a skilled accompanist as Odman could have accentuated as dynamically. And just before everything closed by government mandate, a quintet led by trumpeter Şenova Ülker blared to the

harmonies of humanity's last dance with each other in free public spaces, indoors, when it was becoming risky to sit and listen to music behind closed doors. It was as if he had the premonition to understand just how important it would be to keep playing, as he invited guest musicians up in droves right out of the audience. An electric bassist here, a saxophonist there. They joined core bandmates, Burak Dursun on trombone, Önder Focan on guitar, Anil Deniz on bass, Firtına Kırıl on drums. That was in mid-March, 2020, when Ülker blasted away on his elegant piece of brass with all of the power of a true bandleader.

As the world reopened, and people have returned to live music in clubs and halls having experienced the depths of solitude, the strains of family dependency, governmental oversight, and a general state of health emergency, the need for jazz has only intensified. Istanbul's Nardis is a gem of nostalgia, recalling the ambiance of old New York, when America's Great Migration brought blues musicians furnished with parade band instruments from New Orleans and its environs about the deep south up to freer, northern cities. And they mixed, mingled, and played out with the heart and soul of the universal yearning for freedom that has transformed jazz into a seamlessly adaptable international art form. That is the spirit that Ceren Temel held when leading her quartet on August 13.

Temel is a gifted scat singer with a keen sense of vocal notation. Her second set began with an ode to hipsters, accompanied by Kaan Bıykoğlu on a cutting-edge electric hammond organ with Önder Focan on guitar and Firtına Kırıl on drums. The intensity of solos by Bıykoğlu burst and exploded with immaculate prowess as supported by Kırıl. And as always, with a certain sound reminiscent of Jim Hall and Wes Montgomery, Focan kept time and elaborated on the jazz tradition with a perfectionist's sensibility. Temel played one of her compositions. And although Costa performed a peerless version of The Girl from Ipanema, Nardis is a precious forum where Turkey's top jazz composers premiere and play their own pieces, both the vocalists and instrumentalists. It is the music, ultimately, that binds them, each note rolling off their tongues and fingers with delight, swinging.

And while perhaps set to more fixed approaches to tune and time, the classical music world in the largest Turkish metropolis is as sharp, inventive and robust as any city in the world. On the opening night of the 49th Istanbul Music Festival, a light breeze wafted through the open-air amphitheater in Harbiye, just a few steps from downtown core, the bustle of Taksim Square, verdant Maçka Park and the uptown district of Nişantaşı. The fantasies of Sergey Prokofiev and Dimitri Shostakovich adapted the popular dances of their listeners in Soviet Russia, animating the forms of yore with medleys that surprised and astonished the cultural establishment with crescendos and glissandos that soared across their keyboards and fretboards, surpassing all prior definitions of virtuosity with a venturesome playfulness.

Concert pianist Anna Vinnitskaya made it look easy, and fun. She powered up and down the notation of Piano Concerto no.1 in D flat Major, op.10 by Prokofiev, followed by two works by Shostakovich, Piano Concerto no.1 in C minor, op.35 and Suite for Jazz Orchestra no.2 (Suite for Variety Orchestra), the latter of which quoted from a time when European composers were listening to American jazz, and adapting their musical vocabularies to New World creativity. There was no one as entertaining on the opening night as conductor Aziz Shokhakov, whose every frenetic bounce made his hair flap like the wings of a bird in flight. The choice of composition was perfect for an opening night, as it started the energy of the festival with so many bangs, pops and whistles, the proud and glorious precedent of musical energy erupting from that country which shares the Black Sea with Turkey, where much of Western music history has been made, still rightfully celebrated.

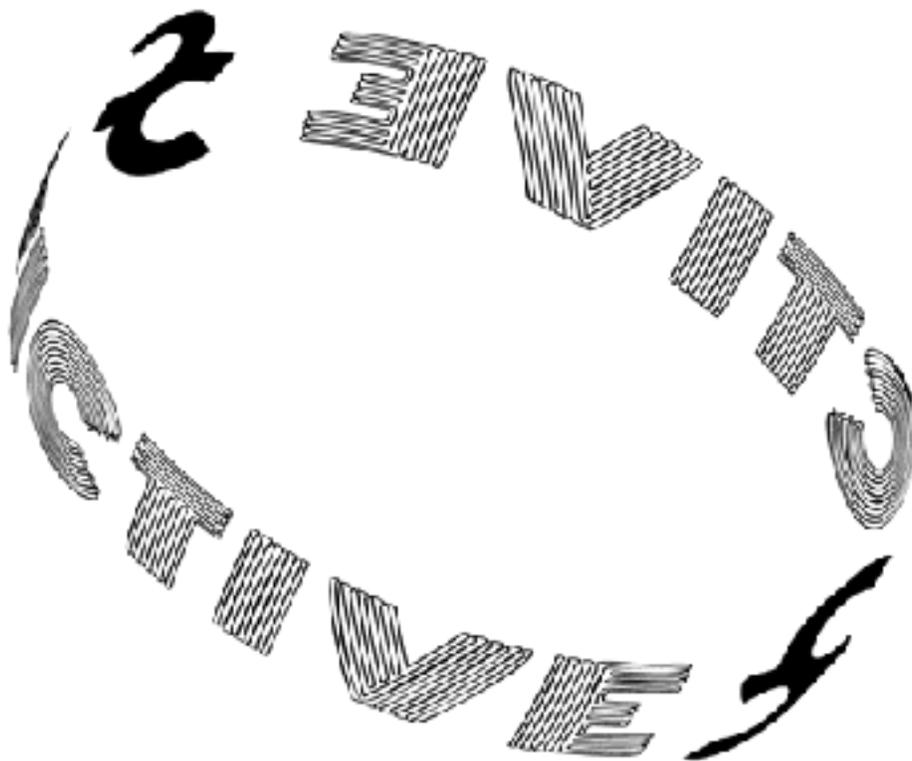
That does not mean that music history is not being made today, quite the contrary, as its continuity is absolutely inspired by the vigor of performing past works. Out of Turkey, a legend of new music has long risen. The name Fazil Say provokes the eccentric magic of classical music in the 21st century. A composer-performer who references Turkish folk music in his increasingly impressive repertoire or recordings and compositions, Say is a national hero, and equally a universalist mad genius whose art knows no bounds, a figure of world heritage whose relationship to his country of birth is channeled through his music, imbuing the world with a revitalization of musical sound as it echoes from the instruments and voices born and bred by Turkey's diverse, international fusions of culture.

The second night of the 49th Istanbul Music Festival, Say sat at the piano, alone, and played a world premiere of his composition, titled, Piano Sonata, op.99, "New Life". It was an ecstatic embrace of personal and collective survival in the midst of global arrest. He conducted himself with one hand, feeling the music to abandon, as he plucked the strings of the piano, dazzling with avant-garde effects. He followed that with another world premiere, which was intended to reach audiences in Germany prior, but due to the pandemic had been rescheduled for Istanbul. Violin Sonata no.1, op.7 and Violin Sonata no.2, op.82, "Mount Ida" were played to the accompaniment of Friedemann Eichhorn, a violinist who has a special report with Say, as the two have a recording history. Eichhorn plays theatrically, and while performing "Mount Ida" in particular, an homage to the highlands which, in 2019, roused progressive Turks and civil society allies to environmental activism to protect the landscape from extractive industry.

Eichhorn emulated the sound of birds with his violin, projecting a scintillating variety of chirps and squeaks as Say moved from themes of heavy dramatic force to achingly tender emotionality. Prior to playing Scherzo for violin and piano in C minor (F.A.E Sonata), composed by a very young Johannes Brahms, Eichhorn told the story of the composition, and that one of its motifs was loneliness, but that he did not feel lonely in Istanbul as he

proclaimed that everyone in the audience were his friends. Finally, Casalquartett came onstage to deliver Agadio for String Quartet, op.11 by Samuel Barber, and the strength of their vibrating, bowed wooden instruments rushed forth, resounding with palpable energy. The evening concluded with “The Walking Mansion” in Memory of Atatürk, op.72, a composition by Say, which he performed in his singular and peerless gusto, at times hovering over his bench, spreading one of his hands over his head as if he were conjuring the spirit of his subject, the founder of the Turkish republic, fleshing out the magisterial grandeur of a man who he, as a musician, has come to immortalize by the sheer beauty of notes successively played to the tempo of the age.

Pierre English is a music critic based in Montreal, Canada



The Mystic Lie

by Dina Said

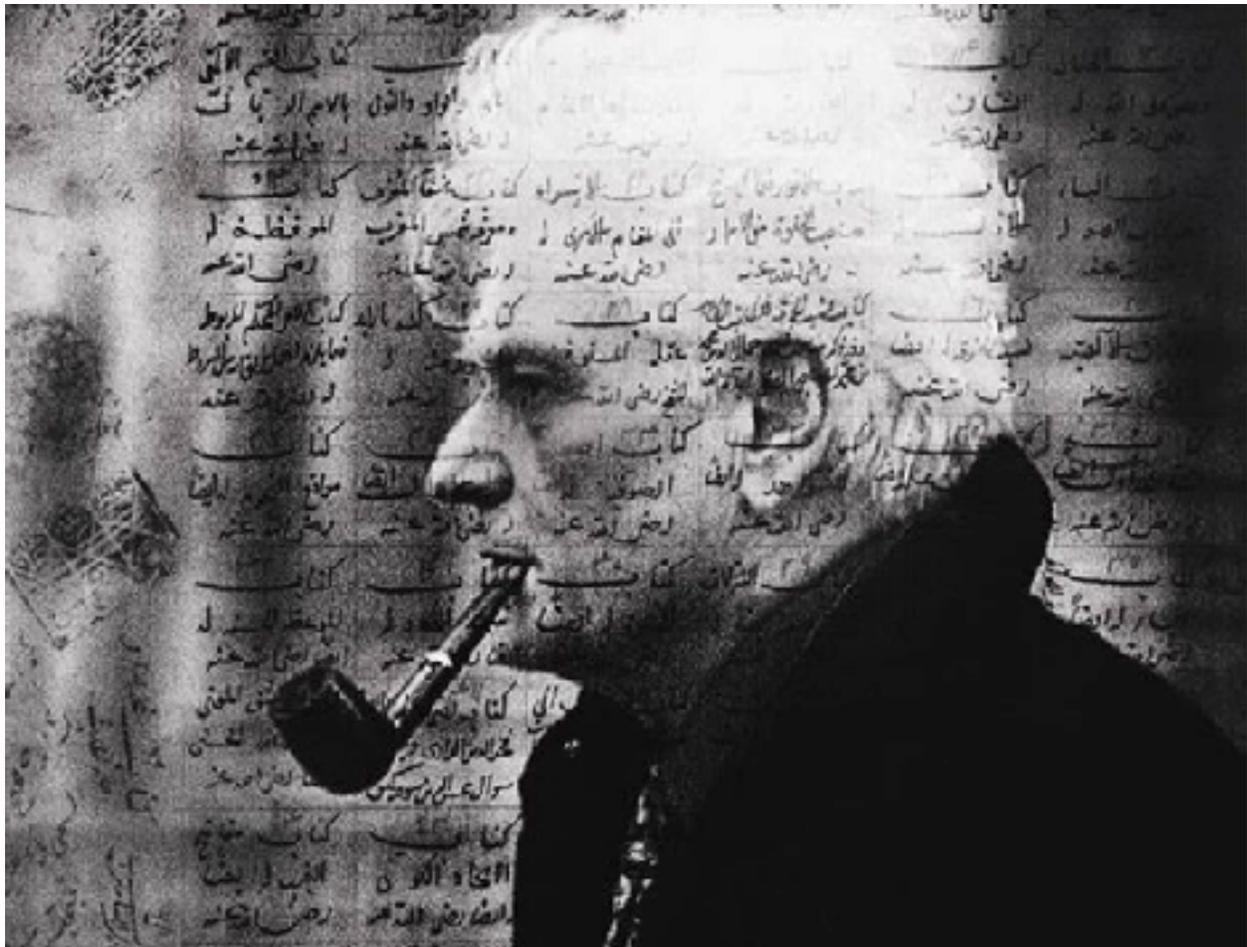


Image Credit: Paul Hoi

Ibn 'Arabi and Poststructuralism

The range of Ibn 'Arabi's writings reveals the limits of verbal representation as a means to rational knowledge. Although born from the context of Sufism, his thought speaks critically to poststructuralist theory. Research into the extant primary material which attempts to clear the fog of Ibn 'Arabi's teachings is still often masked in abstruse esotericism, both in reference to the Eastern and Western traditions of avant-garde philosophy and pious religiosity.

It is, therefore, more practical, considering prevailing scientific definitions of knowledge, to either set out to imitate the names and forms which Ibn 'Arabi uses (and does not use), or to simply accent the mysteries of the mysteries which underly the tone of Ibn 'Arabi's letters.

In his 1980 translation of Ibn 'Arabi's "Bezels of Wisdom", classical Arabic scholar R.W.J. Austin, echoed: "If my works evince any form of composition, it was unintentional. Some works I wrote...in sleep or through mystical revelation" (Austin, 13). His writing is not subject to strict interpretability, even if some of the terminology he employs might be. The creative writings of Ibn 'Arabi defend liberal readings of Islamic texts.

To interpret is merely to expose the ungraspable nature of meaning, as the identity of the words which inspired the interpretation. In his tract, "Bezels of Wisdom", Ibn 'Arabi analyzes twenty seven prophets as metaphors for specific expressions of wisdom. Verbal meaning itself is the connection between the terms, Cosmos and Reality. Their meanings, however, are only understood as, "...a divine disclosure from which is ascertained the origin of the forms of the Cosmos receiving spirits" (Austin, 51).

Ibn 'Arabi expresses a phenomenal fusion of philosophy and metaphor. Interpretations of his texts are a symbol of the fleeting nature of representation or interpretation, in reference to notions such as, "Reality".

For modern, Western philosophy, the works of Ibn 'Arabi are equally inspired by the type of logical forms which limit thought, within ever-decreasing possibilities of expression. Contemporaries of Ibn 'Arabi had formulated such metaphysical speculation to the extent that the existence of the sacred had a monopoly on human thought, instead of freeing or expanding it into an honest recognition of thoughtlessness, transcendent of human cognition.

In the same way, rationalism took over Christian theology to the effect that God had become as dead as concrete, for the magic of its mythology had succumbed to a purist

realism. While there are many exceptions to these circumstances, Ibn 'Arabi served to counter what was then a mainstream fount of belief.

Ibn 'Arabi returned the study of metaphysics to its source by pointing out that its methodologies ignored the significance of reflexive subjectivity. The vocabularies of secularism and theology overlap between Ibn 'Arabi and Jacques Derrida, as summed up in a passage from *Sufism and Deconstruction: A comparative study of Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi* by Ian Almond, published in 2004: "...for Ibn 'Arabi, the philosophers and the theologians have yet to understand the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God. For Derrida, Western metaphysics has never problematized the word 'meaning'" (Almond, 9).

The relationship between Ibn 'Arabi and modern Western philosophy, especially as expressed in the works of Derrida, is not based on the idea of positing absolute objectivity but in using the relational subjectivity of the author as basis for critique regarding the use of language to mean anything at all.

The meaning of any text, when read through the prism of Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy, encompasses an open, infinitude of interpretations, returning human experience to the fundamental relationship between symbol and reality.

Ibn 'Arabi, coming from a tradition of Quran studies amid the progressive, multicultural airs of medieval Seville, was no stranger to vast ranges of interpretation, and included an ontological hermeneutical practice that he termed, the "Oneness of Being." This concept runs throughout his works, unifying them with his signature literary mark.

Derrida, in a sense more radical saying, "...no text has a single, 'proper' meaning, but rather an infinite possibility of immanent ones" (Almond, 70). It is this oneness, or infinity of possibilities which transcends rational speculation.

Because there is no absolute point to a reading in accordance with the atheistic sentiments of Derrida, his analysis of meaning negates oneness as a hindrance to understanding. The essence of Ibn 'Arabi's textual interpretation is that of an encounter with oneness, which destroys the inherent identity of text which a reader might interpret.

In Sufi history, one movement which might relate to Ibn 'Arabi's philosophy is called the "Malamiyya", or the People of Blame. The idea that spiritual advancement is unidentifiable and inconspicuous is embodied in the social practice of the Malamiyya, who partake in normal, mundane, daily activities. Their spiritual work goes unseen. They do not wear different clothes, or use different words.

The inward turn that defines the path of knowledge might be described as, "...glimpsing the reality of the metaphysical abyss upon which one's sign-system is

founded...”(Almond, 110). It can be derived that since Ibn ‘Arabi stays confused, he respects the infinitely evasive, unknowable mystery. He knew that his every inclination to communicate would be subject to the elusive nature of meaning. He wrote to reveal the illusions of meaning.

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Creativity by Renan Koen



Film and Reality by Bedrich Fritta, from Theresienstadt ghetto (1942-1944)

The following is an excerpt from "Positive Resistance" (2021, Gözlem Press) by Renan Koen, translated from the Turkish by Sibel İpeker, and edited by Elabe Hosseinzadeh

When it comes to creativity, it immediately makes sense to create a work of art or a piece of music. However, the creativity I want to talk about is one that we can live in every field and every minute of life. Gaining flexibility by going beyond what we have known so far. With the help of this flexibility we have gained, we can find a solution to our current occupation in our life. "I can never figure this out!" "I can't find a way out", "I can never stand this" "I'm right, he's wrong" or "We do this, we are not like them, they are foreigners"

and many other similar ways, instead of being flexible and creatively finding solutions. This is actually something that helps our mental structure tremendously.

Nowadays, science focuses on two different mental structures. One of them is “Fixed Mental Structure” and the other is “Flexible, Growing Mental Structure”. Basically, I can describe these two mental structures as follows: Fixed Mental Structure categorizes every event that happens as success or failure, while Flexible Mental Structure considers every event that happens as a means of improvement. Actually, one of them is aggressive and the other one is peaceful. One of them is captured in his own prison, the other one is free. A person may naturally be in a fixed mental structure or a flexible mental structure, but it is possible to switch from a fixed mental structure to a flexible one. The biggest tool that will enable this transition is to discover one’s own creativity. A person’s own creativity is hidden in his abilities. Everyone is surely very skilled at least at one thing, whatever it is, in whatever field it is. What we call talent is a predisposition, and predisposition makes it easier to learn and be creative in that field. The person who has learned to be creative once can be creative in all aspects of his/ her life.

What is this creativity, what effect does it have on the human brain?

When a person learns or creates something new, he activates an area in his brain that he has not used before. Creation activates many parts of the brain simultaneously. This process, in which many emotions and thoughts are activated at the same time, provides a significant expansion in the brain. At the same time, doing something creative, being creative takes us out of the situation we are in at that moment. Through creativity, we move to a new state in our perspective by activating a new area in our brain. In this way, a person who has learned to go from place to place and has realized this, has now gained the ability to use the same creativity in his/ her life. This gives the person a considerable amount of flexibility. This flexibility, acquired through the ability to create life, brings along more prejudice and honest confrontation with the situations we are in. In fact, it does not only bring, but it also enables us to produce solutions in a realistic and flexible way without the need to instrumentalize anything during confrontation. This approach to life makes us more resilient, healthier in all respects, and more and more Positively Resistant towards life.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihályi too called this situation “Flow”. Flow is when the person is performing any activity, to be completely devoted to this activity. It passes to a certain mental state by enjoying the activity he/she is in with all his/her energy. According to Csikszentmihályi, flow is the motivation gathered at a certain point. Emotions in the flow are at the service of practice and learning. However, all emotions acted positively. Moreover, positively activated emotions are integrated with the activity. There is nothing for the

person other than the activity they are focusing on at that moment. All this brings about a sense of joy, a state of joy.

The creativity we are in with determination changes both the direction of our life, our emotions, and our mental structure in a flexible and positive way. In fact, there are many ways we can all recall the creativity that we used so much to express ourselves when we were babies. We can change the way we think, get creative art education, follow a path we have never followed in any subject, and take a step into a fuller creative way of life. Let's not forget that a baby who does not know how to speak yet can manage to express himself/herself by using his/her creativity. So, we can all use our creativity to express ourselves in peaceful ways. In each of us, we can awaken this competence, which has been present since our infancy but has been obscured in time with what we are taught, and we can use it to become a healthier individual, this is one of the most natural rights of human beings.

With my deepest respects and gratitude to the brave Teresiensdadt / Terezin composers, with high positive resistance, who honestly confront the situation they are in, protect their place without giving up until their last breath with the power they have received from their creations and the discipline they have received...

Renan Koen is a Turkish-Jewish concert pianist, music therapist and public educator. Since the release of her 2015 album, "Holocaust Remembrance / Before Sleep", she has toured the world lecturing on the Holocaust, specifically Theresienstadt and the composers interned there with youth groups, and recently to a global audience in January 2020 at the UN Headquarters in NYC for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Earlier in her career, she released, "Lost Traces, Hidden Memories" (2014), an album of Ladino music, inspired by her heritage, raised among the Sephardic communities of Istanbul. Her recent album, "March of the Music", was released in July of 2021, accompanied by her new book, "Positive Resistance".



No Man's Cinema by Eleni Papadopoulou



Photo: Marios Stylianou. © Rosa Barba.

An open-air cinema enlivens the Cypriot no-man's land

On the unusually cool night of Friday, September 10th, people gathered around the space of an open-air cinema, between the Cypriot towns of Deryneia and Famagusta, for the opening of the work of the internationally renowned Italian artist and cinematographer Rosa Barba.

Reminiscent of a ritual site, the organic shape of the amphitheater formed a complete circle around a rectangular metal frame. On the screen a herd of fish swims among amphorae at the bottom of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Sea has a long history as a connecting route for trade and cultural exchange between East and West, but it also marks

the separation between North and South. In Cyprus, a 180-kilometer "Buffer Zone" also separates North and South and is the starting point for Rosa Barba's artistic intervention.

The project started seven years ago, when Barba was invited to create an artwork in Cyprus by the Point Center for Contemporary Art in Nicosia and curator Mirjam Varadinis.

"We chose Rosa because it was obvious through her work that she could be interested in Cyprus from its anthropological, geopolitical dimension," explained Andre Zivanari, director of the Point Center for Contemporary Art. Following this visit, the artist proposed to build an open air cinema sculpture in the Buffer Zone, continuing the exploration in her artistic practice of landscape and human intervention in nature. Barba initiated the idea of an amphitheatre with a permeable screen, on which films could be watched from both the southern and the northern side. "In all my works, I like to have this permeable screen, where the viewer can see the film from both sides, where you use your body to navigate around it." It is more a sculptural idea," said the artist. Working within this political landscape, she sought to counterbalance existing images of conflict with emphatic expression of solidarity and openness, thus transforming the image of division into a shared experience.



photo courtesy of Famagusta Avenue Garage

In parallel to the open air cinema, she created a film entirely shot in Cyprus, " Inside the Outset: Evoking a Space of Passage (2021)". The film won first prize in the Italian Council International Competition (Third Edition) in 2018 and was awarded a grant by the DGAAP (Directorate-General for Contemporary Art and Architecture and Urban Regions) in Italy. Through its poetic maneuvering of the island's politically charged landscapes, the film subverts its Aphroditisque persona. The camera, through its liquid honesty, wades through and comments on the serrated tautness between the captured, the capturing, the captivated, and the captivating. The film also includes underwater shots of the Mazotos shipwreck, as well as aerial shots of archaeological sites and follows Barba's artistic approach of examining liminal states which manifest in between contested spaces, both mentally and geographically, in order to offer a new perspective.

"At first we thought of the Buffer Zone area near Mammari village North of Nicosia as a possible location, but it was very difficult due to obstacles set by the U.N. Over time, we contacted the U.N again through the Italian embassy, when we had already received funding and completed the film and were looking for a way to implement the idea of cinema. The U.N referred us to Deryneia Municipality and the Famagusta Avenue Garage, (center of inter-communal activities of Deryneia supported by the UN). Thus, through the Municipality of Deryneia we managed to ensure access to the Buffer Zone, something not at all easy. The truth is that the project became a reality because it was the wish of many people ", Ms. Zivanari explains. The artist has envisioned the purpose of this outdoor intervention to serve as a meeting point for members of all communities on the island.

"It was a complex project. Archaeologist Stella Demesticha gave us permission to film the under water shipwreck in Mazotos. It was the first time she gave filming permission to anyone outside her team. And that was the beginning, at every level, we had to be able to integrate a lot of important people into the vision. All stages were a challenge. It is the first time that a work with such a political dimension is realized and I believe in the power of art, to be able to challenge, to be able to bring communities together. For it to remain active it must be activated by both communities. That was the idea from the beginning, that was Rosa's vision and we realized it based on this."

For the construction of the open-air Cinema, the artist focused on incorporating the theatre into Deryneia's natural environment, avoiding materials alien to the landscape. In collaboration with architect Maya Shopova, Barba worked with rammed earth material on site. "Because it is the first construction in the Buffer Zone since 1974, I did not want to impose a structure that is a building, it should be something that does not use exogenous materials, something that can disappear again. Thus, everything was made from the earth itself. We dug the ground and used it at the same time to compress it into a temporary structure, so the seats may eventually disintegrate in the coming years. My work generally deals with time, continuous transformation and progress. "If someone decides that this structure should stay, then it can stay, but maybe it will no longer be necessary, if one day the island is open and united", Rosa explains.

Point Center for Contemporary Art is collaborating with Famagusta Avenue Garage and an advisory group of artists from both sides of the Buffer Zone to develop a program of activities. Its intention is to highlight the ability of the arts to create spaces of interaction and coexistence. The open-air cinema will be expanded as a long-term project available to the Municipality of Deryneia and the artistic and film making communities of Cyprus to launch a multifaceted dialogue.

"There is a force behind supporting art production in Cyprus. It is easier to realise projects in Cyprus because we are a small place, things can be done on this basis. We gain so much by doing these collaborations. There is immediacy in carrying out a project without intermediaries, precisely because the team involved is small in number. A large museum would not have the ability to work on a project for eight years. They understand that the institutions that are not in the system, the 'independents', have much higher chances to produce", Ms. Zivanari emphasizes.

"To see the Buffer Zone, otherwise known. As No-mans Land, to breathe again with the creation of a gathering place for the island's communities, for us is something unique. We were very happy to see that as a bi-communal center we can become the channel between the artist's goals for transforming the Buffer Zone into a common experience. The whole process of implementation of this innovative project, but also the inauguration itself with the presence of a large number of people from both communities, proved once again that this island is too small to be separated. There is a great will from a large portion of the world from both communities to develop relations between them and the appropriate political will is needed to encourage these contacts and create appropriate safe spaces," said the Famagusta Avenue Garage team.

The aim is for the open-air cinema to develop into a space of gathering, cooperation, creation and mutual understanding between the communities of the island, to be utilized to the fullest by artists, cultural groups, young people, civil society organizations and all those who believe in a united and peaceful Cyprus of the future. The goal is to be able to host screenings and performances that promote peace and cooperation on a regular basis, creating a stable audience from both communities, while also offering alternatives to the people in the area. Many organizations, as well as artists, have communicated and expressed their intention and interest to organise cultural activities in the open-air cinema.

Eleni Papadopoulou is a photojournalist in Nicosia, Cyprus



At the Zambomba by Tosh Hayashi



illustration by Tosh Hayashi

“Olé, my Francisco! Give us another one!” I cried, as my cousin Francisco finished the fandanguito he had been singing with a drawn out soulful ayeee, going out with a gasp, José right there next to him with a gentle flourish on the guitar which peaked, just as Francisco did, and then closed with something that made me think of how webs of waves form, skipping little rocks.

"Eh-hey!" the crowd bellowed. It had been a very good fandanguito.

None in the neighbourhood could play the guitar like José. He was kind of a figure in town now, if you followed what was going on with flamenco, and we were all delighted that he had come to our little zambomba along with Francisco. One of the most sought after guitarists around the tabancos, the peñas, and the teatros, his technique was precise and his guitar was educated and scientific while remaining intensely evocative and deeply emotional.

His instincts on the guitar while accompanying a singer were truly a wonder to behold. He could follow the whim of a singer in any direction and to any destination, seeming sometimes to turn a moment of near tragedy, total collapse, into one of singular beauty.

Autentico!

And Francisco?! He was becoming an artista of the world, traveling to America and Japan with companies from Sevilla, Madrid and Jerez de la Frontera. His singing sounded like the old masters even though, at only 23 years of age, he was still a very young man. Furthermore, he was so handsome and carried himself like a bullfighter. We are all singers in my family, but Francisco shone the most brightly among us younger ones. Why, he'd been invited to the stage by the likes of Manuela Valiente and Antonio Sanchez and had just returned from singing for the great guitarist Vicente Carrasco, touring music festivals in Germany and across the south of France.

"It goes very well with Francisco," I heard the old men playing dominoes saying earlier that morning over coffee at the Cafeteria la Vega, "Very well, indeed."

"Eat, drink, and live!" was a fashionable thing to say to one another in those days. A saying of the gitanos—the gypsies—it was an affirmation for life as it should be lived: simply, festively, and with all of one's heart. In Spanish, it goes, "Come, bebe, y vive, y ya'sta" - eat, drink, and live, and that is all - ya'sta. There should not be so many things. Francisco made a toast of this gitano wisdom then, lifting his glass of fino as he intoned it, taking a long sip.

Many glasses were raised. Loosely huddled around the fire, some sat on benches or portable chairs, and some swayed on their feet. Some swayed more than others!

And the zambomba? This is what we call our parties in the streets during the season leading up to Christmas. We had set up between the trees of a small square which jutted into a wide, level opening between the tightly packed stone buildings along the slope of Calle Limón as it curved down towards the cathedral. It was a warm, late autumn evening, and the moon behind the clouds cast a silhouette of palm trees above the cathedral and of the stone flats stretching off under the setting Andalusian sky.

"Yes, Francisco, give us another one!" someone else called.

"Oh, alright!" agreed Francisco, dabbing the sweat from his brow and wiping down the back of his neck with a folded up kerchief, hot from the fire and from the singing. "But, afterwards we must all sing! This is not a performance, but a Zambomba! I begin to feel selfish! Am I right, José?!" José shook his head vaguely and, grinning softly, shrugged smoothly through another light flurry of picados and arpeggios.

“Let’s go for Bulerias, capo on the 4, please, fenómeno.” Francisco, tossing these words at José, wiped his forehead one more time before folding the square piece of silk cloth back into his shirt pocket.

José took the half-smoked cigarette from his lips and propped it on the head of his guitar, pinching it between two strings so it could stay there, smoking like a stick of incense as he played on. Squinting from the smoke, he obediently repositioned the capo to the 4th fret, checking the guitar's tuning with another short display of virtuosity, a fast tumbling run of ascending and descending picados. Making a few small adjustments to some of the strings as he went along, José was soon satisfied and, letting his notes trickle and fade, he wordlessly signaled to Francisco that he was ready for him to begin.

Their bulerias echoed off the stone buildings up Calle Limón and into Plaza San Sebastian. The flames leapt from the rim of the fire barrel in the dim light, casting embers. I saw faces dancing like demons, wild shadows. In their eyes flickered and flashed the festive spirits of the night.

I heard the wailing of generations who have endured deep sorrow. I heard the expression of pure, ecstatic joy in this small corner of our beloved Andalucía.

Tosh Hayashi is a flamenco aficionado, guitar practitioner, sporadic doodler, and fiction dabbler based in Calgary, Canada



On the Move

by Cem Özuduru



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özuduru

If Istanbul were a storyteller she would want to tell the story of Beyoğlu and its back-alleys.... The story of the long and ancient street that stars as the lead actress in so many people's lives and their little adventures.

She plays a big part in the life of a humble man called Yasin Gencer, a street vendor with big ambitions for the good life.

Yasin is the only child of a family from Tokat, a small province deep in the middle of Anatolia who had immigrated to Istanbul when he was just a kid. Now he is in his early 30's, still trying to make it in the big city.



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özüdü

I said his 'family', but as the matter of fact, when Yasin migrated to İstanbul, he had no one beside him other than his grandfather. And after a little while, he disappeared too.

Yasin always thought of himself as a dead man. He had grown up in the streets since he was 10, slept in the workshops where he worked, and scavenged for leftovers at the feet of passersby, or at restaurants, pulling all-nighters for the crumbs they left on their doorsteps...

It was a sad and dangerous upbringing for a child of his age... There wasn't one shop that he hadn't worked for around Taksim, Ömer Hayyam and Dolapdere. Not one restaurant floor was left unswept, not one barber shop towel stained or diner dish unwashed...

He did it all. And he learned from his environment and his employers. He learned how to survive. He learned the good and the bad and which neighborhoods were okay to wander around in and which parts of the town were to be avoided, forbidden, not only to a child but also to adults considering the horrid possibilities that awaited in the dark, ready to attack when you least expected it....



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özüdüru

Some streets could make a man out of him, and some streets were made of the stuff of nightmares. He knew he was better off without them.

He was smart and he had a lot of luck. If we asked him, he'd tell us that the best luck he had was the secret recipe of his famous rice and beans, as taught to him by his grandfather, but of course one needs a lot of other things to survive in the streets of Beyoğlu other than a rice recipe.

He had all of the ingredients that he needed to make it out alive deep inside his soul, hidden, and he didn't know what made him out to be a survivor yet, but he'd learn soon enough...

So let's not ask him now.



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özüdüru

When Yasin was serving in the military, his superiors had decided that he belonged in the kitchen and even let him cook his grandfather's recipe from time to time. When he returned home from the army, he bought himself a small vendor cart and started selling his product on the streets.

People loved Yasin's food and in no time, he built himself a decent number of loyal customers.

Every day at 9 pm he would roll his rickety little wheels on the wet, worn out streets of Beyoğlu and tell people about his food, make them taste it, make them realize how delicious it is. He tirelessly created a network of satisfied customers.

He hustled in the grind and bled for his job and he felt like he was a real human being only when he was working. He felt alive. He felt the blood pumping deep inside his veins and the air he breathed somehow felt magical, filled with the essences of a decaying, crumbling, dying, city, but also one that was still dancing, still kicking and screaming.

He noticed the small things and really makes an effort to know these people, and the streets they walk by. He didn't know how much of a rarity this trait was and that ignorance was probably Çiğdem's favourite thing about him. As his girlfriend, she loves how hard-working and unassuming he always is.

Çiğdem, on the other hand is in her late 20s. She moved to Dolapdere after leaving her father and perverted stepbrother and decided to live her life on her own terms. For an attractive woman in Beyoğlu, suffering unwanted admirers of all ages, growing up was a very challenging thing. But one thing Çiğdem was not was a coward. She lived all her life fighting, and even though nowadays it's become harder and harder, she is not one to shy away from a confrontation. This is where she differs from Yasin...



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özüdüru

They both share the same desires and aspirations for a better life but whereas Çiğdem is totally aware of the obstacles ahead and all the rotten encumbrances life presents, Yasin is blissfully ignorant of the fact that they are indeed surrounded by the monsters of this ancient city.

Both struggle to keep dreaming, to achieve their shared goals and they are all they've got, but to keep the dream pure and manageable, they will have to demonstrate their grit and vigor like never before. A dream, after all, demands your constant diligence and unwavering persistence.

So, if this was the end of our story, then maybe it wouldn't be hard to imagine that our lovely couple struggled to keep their dreams alive and maybe ultimately they've failed but as you are well aware, our story takes place in Istanbul, Beyoğlu and she is a wild, unpredictable and very promiscuous lady who's full of adventures and surprises.

And of course, once upon a night, faith came to knock on the door of Yasin's unsuspected little life while he was working in his usual place, serving his food with his usual warm smile and bright enthusiasm.

At the most crowded time of night, a young man named Tufan appeared out of nowhere and made his way around customers to get to a car that was waiting on the other side of the street. But before he could reach his destination, a regular police control occurred right in the middle of the sidewalk. There were two police cars and a lot of cops who were out on the lookout for any potential troublemakers.

Tufan is a timid, shy, even fearful guy, but he is angry, indecisive and also very young. Add dope addiction to this mix and you've got the ingredients of a very troublesome young man on our hands. And that's what we've got.



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özüdüru

He looks around with panicky stares, tries to find an opening to pry himself out of this blockage but the street is too crowded and it's too late to go back. The police officers had already started to check people for ID's. If the officer closer to him gets a hold of him to check his papers, he's in for a world of trouble. Why? Why is he afraid that much? What's with the helpless look in his eyes that resembles a hunted deer?

If he did nothing wrong, then why would he be afraid of the police officers? Well, as the matter of fact he did something wrong and he has all the right in the world to be afraid of the cops and what they might find if they'd frisked him. So he misjudges the situation and makes the mistake of a lifetime. He reaches deep into his pockets and pulls out a tightly wrapped package full of heroin, and stashes it inside Yasin's vendor cart while nobody's looking. Then he leaves the scene without looking back.

He gets in the car waiting for him there and exhales. The problem is the driver in the car is a dirty cop named Suat and he needs that package right then. But of course, given the fact that the street is filled with policemen, Suat needs to find another solution to retrieve his package.

When you work for the biggest crime boss within the radius of ten blocks of labyrinth-like neighborhoods and you also steal from him in order to pay for a blood debt you've owed cause you've killed some Syrian mob guy who harassed your stripper girlfriend.... Then you've got to be quiet about your plans or next time, you can end up in a bodybag yourself.

So Suat, neck deep in debt, constantly threatened by Syrian mafia, feeling the suspecting eye of his official boss at the narcotic department, carefully constructs a plan to get his package back. Only he forgets that his partner is a young drug addict who cannot be trusted.

When the next day arrives and Yasin finds the heroin bag with Çiğdem, the first thing they do is go to the police. But afterwards, when Çiğdem comes home alone while Yasin goes to oversee the paint job in their brand new shop that will become their dream restaurant, all the happiness and hopes for the future suddenly trembles and shatters. Tufan is home and he wants her to come with him. In exchange, Yasin will bring them the drugs to get Çiğdem...

She of course resists being taken hostage, and Tufan becomes aggressive. Things immediately get out of hand as they usually do when drugs and addiction are involved, and in the heated battle for her life, Çiğdem stabs Tufan with a curling iron, in the face, killing him instantly.

The shit hits the fan. Suat finds the bag in the evidence room and returns it to Yasin. Since he is compromised and his partner is killed by the hand of Çiğdem. They both owe him his original plan and he needs to use Yasin as a dealer to deliver five cuts to five different addresses or Suat will take something from Yasin that he will never get back: Çiğdem.



A still from "Seyyar", a new series by Cem Özüdüru

Yasin, an honest, humble street vendor, a rice and beans guy who is on the verge of opening his own shop, now has to act as a drug dealer with small packages hidden inside his food in order to save his girlfriend, save his one and only dream and ultimately, save his own life from Suat's insane, hungry, bloody hands....

But soon he'll find out that on the edges of the dark streets, hidden beneath the wet nooks and dusty crannies of their godforsaken city, a much more threatening danger awaits him, searching for him, lusting after him like a hungry and forgotten god who requires a blood sacrifice for his unquenchable thirst...

Thus, a dark and bloody adventure begins...

Cem Ozuduru was born in 1987 in Istanbul. After entering the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, he published two graphic novels, Zombistan (2008) and Dawn Frost (2010) leading up to his graduation in 2010. His professional career continued with short stories, movie scripts, and directing, on top of creating comic books. His work in the movies and television includes the scripts for the horror movie Baskın (2015), Housewife (2017), the TV series Wolf (2017), and the feature film Wolf (2018), with him directing the latter two. His other credits in comics include Once Upon a Time on the Soccer Field (2015) and Perihan (2017; Europe Comics 2020). Perihan was adapted to a movie in 2019, titled "The Girl with No Mouth," winning several awards. His latest book is Solo, Night Hunger and Other Stories.

At Sea by Alex Butler



The Herring Net (1885) by Winslow Homer

I was reading, and stumbled across this story of a legendary Gloucester fisherman in Massachusetts:

In 1883, Howard Blackburn and his dory mate Tom were cod fishing in their two man trawler, and were separated from their mother ship, the Grace Fears. In blizzard conditions, and after five (5) days, the two were assumed dead. When Blackburn returned, he was a hero. Tom passed away and Blackburn resorted to curling his frozen fingers around the oars in order to keep rowing the entire 60 miles... such a incredible example of human resilience.

Juxtaposed in the prose is a simple sonnet, detailing a man's basket of fish and chips - a roadside snack that he enjoys. It is exactly the fish which Blackburn is bringing back from

his fishing voyage. With these two characters - one significantly sacrificing and one reaping the benefits - I tried to create a sense of contrast.

At Sea

Immured Sonnet

The lights are out now, long gone. And the pitter of the rain has grown to a nagging, ponting roar. My eyes strain for the Grace but ghastly winds took her place, exaggerating absence coupled with a void. Mocking us. Although on deck, it looks like Tom has made his peace. His sleep uninterrupted for hours, I think he's lost the fight. The riggings have iced over more times than I can count, clicking together like **Teeth chattering, my introduction** to salted glass. And all the while these ugly cods grin at me, taunting **Supper in London during my stay** lay between the nets. Those mindless mouths from the black depths, **Inside an alley of a busy stretch**, their empty eyes watch Tom slip away and my fingers as they grind **Near the core like intense burnt chimneys**, down to nubs. My fingers, now black, are at least starting to **Fish and chip, my reward and harm** till I lose sense. Or perhaps my faculties simply deny the new pain? **Taste the salt, taste the vinegar and brine**, I tell myself as I smell the air and watch my nailed and skin **My senses cut down to the bitter edge** indeterminate, raw as the sky above. I gave up entirely on my **Oil-kissed flaky fish that tasted like warmth**, thoughts becoming reality. If my compass points true and **Even as the worst wintry gusts hound me** I can keep on till morning we might make it. Tiny ships like **Golden filets carry their perfume** as our Grace must be home now, crew offboarding, bones aching and **Stubborn as a stiff woolen shawl**, pining, grasping for their pints and prayers. Gloucester taverns stir up **A lure to which all lie victim**, ensnared, while my fingers scrape this icy wooden can. Instead of ale, salt **Wounds are scarring over**, like hickory sticks on my frozen beard. So stiff my fingers, if I could just... curl **The lives surrounded, lost, to industry**. Gingerly, my black tar tips bend around the oars. A dead man's grip, am I right, Tom? No response but no matter, we'll stretch these digits like molasses to get back, Tom, I promise. We'll make it in time for a few pints, sell off these white bellied cod and buy a round for the saloon. Hell, we'll be the talk of the shoreline. They'll buy supper for us. A toast for all of Gloucester. And they'll remember Howard Blackburn.

Alex Butler is a nurse in the operating rooms at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, specializing in the trauma and oncology unit. He is an avid reader and writer, living in Somerville, where he enjoys cooking with his wife, Allison.

FICTIVE

No Dance is Illegal

by Sanaz Ghorbani



"Dance Is Illegal In Iran, performance by Sanaz Ghorbani, 1/04/2021 Paris -- photo by Joana Pimentel

I started dancing ballet at age 20. I used to be an actress. After, I studied with a teacher named P. and then continued learning with her students. I started doing contemporary and modern dance from then on.

Modern dance is more than art, it's about science, and doing it in an academic way really attracted me. I had doubts those days, because I had success taking part in three films as an actress. Little by little, I changed and went completely into the dance world.

At Sooreh Art University I majored in theater, drama. In the first semester I had a lesson called "folk culture", and we all had to make a project. I wanted to do something different. I wanted to make a film about Zoroastrian people, or a project about folkloric dances in Iran. So I did an interview on Zoroastrianism with my friend, but then I didn't choose it as my project for some reasons.

I did that Persian folk dance project. I gathered some people. All of us were non-dancers at that time. They were actresses and actors of theater. It was successful. In those days, 10 years ago, it was riskier than today.

During the project and after, I was taking modern and contemporary dance lessons and pilates. We were four people, three guys and I, who continued after that project with modern dance and contemporary, not folkloric. We chose modern and ballet because they are more academic which is more needed in our society.

We made some choreographic works together. The first one was based on Henry Purcell's "Dido's Lament". Some of our friends were musicians. They made a project about "Dido's Lament" and they asked us to choreograph it.

That year there were elections in Iran. It was exactly that night that we were performing this dance, secretly in a small studio, while all of the people outside were striking, shouting. Everyone was telling us that we were mad those days, that the authorities would arrest us. We didn't want to cancel our program. We asked some of our friends to stay at the main door to control everyone, with limited advertisement. Everyone was a friend, or friends of friends.

Still in Iran we have dancers who studied ballet in an academic way before the revolution, but the regime destroyed that after the Islamic Revolution and some of the artists escaped to other countries and some still live in Iran, but they do mainly theatrical performances or limited private dance shows while struggling with a lot of problems due to government restrictions.

So many times they've been arrested by the Iranian government because of their performances. Most people create a small society and have their own shows.

I decided to become a dancer because I needed that more than any other thing, not only me but also a whole country (Iran), which I can inspire and help keep this art alive there.

About my parents' opinion I can say that when I chose “dance” they were worried about my future because I studied graphic design in high school then I changed to theater then dance which is also forbidden in Iran. They eventually accepted what I do.

Every time our friends were arrested we would have to deactivate our social media profiles, change our names or delete posts, be silent for a time, for a couple of days or weeks sometimes. Having the fear inside always, working under risk, it can let you down. Whenever we heard that they arrested a colleague we would postpone performances. The feeling of postponing every time by the government affects the mental and physical potential.

People used to tell us to be careful when they arrested anyone in the wider dance community in Iran, mainly because we are girls and should be careful about our clothes, which is something I never agreed with.

I've never done a performance with hijab in Iran or any other country. Once the owner of a studio we had a performance in argued and almost fought with me. They said we didn't know you were going to have a dance performance without wearing the hijab, I also invited the two genders together. They were going to stop the performance, but I fought and I said I pay you more for this risk for your studio, but I won't do it with a hijab on.

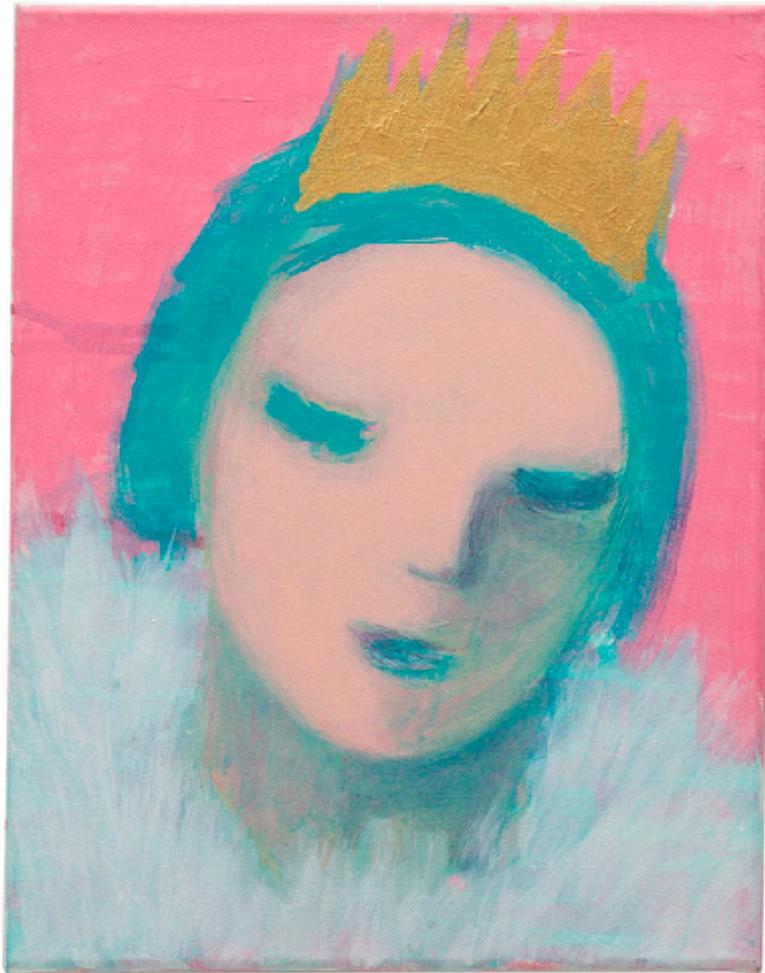
About my university final project for theatre I combined contemporary and folkloric Iranian dancing. I did it with Iranian music. We were three women. This matter is really important for me. We performed it in a very little studio in Tehran. We couldn't perform it at my university because it was a dance performance and maybe they would expel me from the university. So I invited my university teacher to a private studio and we did it there, for them. Also, in my university courses, my teachers used to let me do dance choreographies instead of theater. This way they were supporting me by giving me space to improve in dance. Always, my friends were behind the door to save us from those university directors who were surveying.

In the end, I thank all of my teachers and friends who supported and accompanied me to improve in dance.

Sanaz Ghorbani is a Paris-based dance artist originally from Tebran. She is a movement researcher in contemporary salsa, and also filmmaking. She studies at ACTS école de danse contemporaine and is the founder of @movement.for.growth

Her Inner Child: The Paintings of Ayse Wilson

by Sibel Tomruk



Untitled, oil on canvas, 2019 by Ayse Wilson

Introduction

The painter was at home, and she sounded up, sunny and quick to reveal her origins from Cambridge, Massachusetts, joking with true New England sarcasm. It was a Friday morning in New York City, where Ayse Wilson has called home for the better part of her professional life. While dreading the wait line at the nearest cell shop, she began to reflect on her career as an artist with a presence in Istanbul since 2007, with her first solo show “Swimmers”, at Pg Art Gallery’s former location in Bebek.

“I’m half Turkish, but I’m really American. I grew up in Boston. We used to visit Istanbul a lot when I was growing up, but it was always for family. The creative, professional connection was personal,” said Wilson. “Pg was at a stage where they were looking for new artists, having already taken over an established gallery. They wanted to go in a more contemporary direction.”

After seeing one of her works, Pg asked Wilson to collaborate on a project and she replied, “Absolutely.” The artist was also at a transition point in her life. She had then recently finished her graduate studies and was working for Jeff Koons, an opportunity that she describes as flaccid. “You know, it’s nothing you want to do forever, even though it’s a great experience,” she said.

Noting the trend of galleries that have begun to quit art fairs outright due to the exorbitant amounts of money involved, Wilson is unafraid to sharpen her critique on the nature of the international art business. Dealers simply lose interest after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to sell a painting, as there are increasingly diverse ways to promote names and works in the current landscape.



Daisy Walk, acrylic on canvas, by Ayse Wilson

“Pg understands the artist’s process. A lot of times, gallerists can be bossy, or interested in pleasing. Pg doesn’t care, and it’s working. 25 plus years is a lot for a contemporary art gallery anywhere, especially to be a real gallery that’s trying not only to keep up with the scene, but to contribute, and understand that it’s not a finite point in time. This is an exploration of visual ideas and concepts,” said Wilson.

“Galleries are expensive to run. So many start with such great intentions and then people realize the actual costs, and the pressure on selling. And then to be able to do it for 25 years in New York City, for example, to do it for 10 years, 5 years even is a huge success. Sometimes people close their galleries, not for financial reasons, they just realize that the pace of work isn’t what they were up for or they have families or they just can’t, or rent goes way up.”

“What’s always been exciting to me about Pg is that it was my first real gallery, and my first real person I’m working with. You feel like partners with Pg, not overly commercializing. That’s not meddling. That’s having a real conversation about where you’re going to go,” Wilson said. “I used to think that everything in life is totally spontaneous and then I realized you do have to give thought to things, because that helps you get through it better. I’ve just sort of grown up with Pg as an artist. We know it when we see each other.”

The Shows

“The ‘Swimmers’ series started from a homework project in graduate school and I expanded it. And that’s really the way things work for me as an artist. It starts as a personal answer to a question, a challenge, and then it’s like research. You keep going, and keep going,” said Wilson, remembering her days as a student at the New York Academy of Art in Tribeca. “The artworks are products of this very personal, psychological research. I was so lucky. We did this show, and it was a wonderful show for me and for her.”



Baby Swimmer, acrylic on canvas, 2020 by Ayse Wilson

While a relatively small school, the New York Academy of Art attracted Wilson for its central focus on the study of the human figure. It was a place steeped in the theory that if an artist can paint the human figure, they can paint anything. Wilson roundly agrees, even if she admits that artists don't always want to paint it. Still, in that approach the learning opportunities are boundless. To 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. And I've always found it very interesting to see how it's done over the years. That's why I went to the New York Academy of Art, but I think in the end you learn how to do things by yourself," said Wilson.



Central Park, acrylic on canvas, 2021, by Ayse Wilson

“Swimmers grew out of a very traditional, art school type of assignment, comparing Apollonian ideals to the Dionysian. You know the sort of rational versus the impulsive, and emotional responses, and making two different artworks that contrast those styles. For my Dionysian painting I came up with a voluptuous Swimmer image bursting with the energy of an aqua person.”

“Ten years later, I feel like Pg has blossomed and grown and it’s become really interesting and important, and I’m trying to get there too as an artist. In the meantime, we’ve become good friends. It’s shaped my life,” Wilson said.

“I was prepared, but I feel lucky. I do know from other experiences that it’s really hard to show your work as an artist when you’re not on the same wavelength as the gallery director, or the dealer. You start to see conflict and you don’t understand each other.”

“Unfortunately, the whole money thing comes up, because people need to sell things to keep their businesses, and it becomes awkward for artists because they’re usually not money people. Anyway, that’s how it started. We did one show in Bebek, and she moved her gallery to the second spot, at Bogazkesen. I had two shows there.”



Because I Like It Like That, acrylic on canvas, 2020 by Ayse Wilson

In the years between “Swimmers” and her second solo show at Pg, titled “when we were little” (2012), the gallery had moved to Tophane. By the time she returned to Istanbul for her opening, she had started a family, with two small sons.

“I started to relive my youth through taking care of children, which I never expected I would have all of these going-back-into-time moments of ‘that’s what I was like,’ or ‘that’s what we did,’ or ‘those are the songs we sang’, and those shaped our lives and sometimes we still want to do these things as adults,” she said, contemplating the time of her show “when we were little”, where the experience of raising children emphasized her nostalgia for her childhood memories in Istanbul.

“It was a whole circling back of who you are as a young person and who you are today. There are so many things in common that you realize. I think that’s really life-affirming and healthy and wonderful. It’s hard to be a grownup. It’s hard to be responsible. It’s very boring, and not as spontaneous as we used to be. I felt that I had revisited things that I hadn’t thought about in a very, very long time.”



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 2018 by Ayse Wilson

Wilson's father died when she was very young. He had cancer for about five years, and she remembers feeling death all around her, growing up with the weight of sickness in the house. And what made it worse is that her parents didn't speak openly about it. They were scared to bring it up to their children, to share sadness. The fact that something tragic was happening hung in the air. Her mother had also suffered from mental illness, on and off. It would fuel the bittersweet intensity of the gaze that she paints, as from pairs of gentle, new eyes seeing the world for the first time, slowly learning that happiness comes with undertones of sadness.

"We had all of these heavy-duty themes growing up, and I think that made us, in some ways grow up very quickly, and in some ways you cling to your youth in a very traumatic way, because you say, 'Don't make me deal with these things. Don't make me think about dying. Don't make me think about how needy people can be, how needy grownups can be.' It is such a great thing to be a carefree young child and not worry about stuff," said Wilson, whose paintings are rich with the inner psychological landscapes of childhood innocence. "There's always this moment of arrival, where as a child you realize there are sad things out in the world. There are bad people who will hurt you. There are things that can happen that will be very tragic. It's sad, but it's true and ironic because it helps you be a better person later on in life."



Untitled, acrylic on cardboard, 2021 by Ayse Wilson

When her sons were 8 and 10, she consistently revisited the themes and experiences that are central to growing up, like when a child realizes that they can't go everywhere by themselves, that some places are dangerous. Human nature is deceptive. Friends are sometimes mean. These hard truths are part of the metaphysical growth that comes with maturation in the world. But interestingly, as her art is a reflection of her own mental and emotional state, she draws visual metaphors that connect the dots between her observations of her children, and the inner child within her.

"All of these realizations make you see how sensitive the world is and can be, but you have to do it, because in the end the good outweighs the bad, we think. You have to be an optimist, not naive, but to try. That's what art is about for me, to be an optimist and try to connect, because otherwise what's the point?" said Wilson.

"I don't like art that's depressing. I don't want to talk about death. It's there coming for us today. I don't want to talk about politics too much, because, you know, they're all such assholes."



Untitled, acrylic on cardboard, 2021 by Ayse Wilson

Her second Pg exhibition, “when we were little”, in comparison to “Swimmers”, captured more of an individual profile in the childlike human figure that Wilson painted in soft, plush colors, exuding the quality of prepubescent comforts. A character appears to emerge, lightly, as from the plural repetition of personified cherubs of youth. As she explained, “When you grow as an artist, a lot of the memory and nostalgia of these images connect people to their own experiences of youth, because we all have it, which I felt was something interesting to share.”

“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, whose third solo exhibition at Pg in 2015, titled, “Little Friends” is essentially based on her unique, conceptual approach to a background technique, where she left the “*imprimatura*” layer exposed, seemingly unfinished.

Wilson had practiced classical painting for a long time, pursuing her education in Florence after graduating from Wellesley College in 1991. Her paintings were later compared to the Italian Renaissance master Fra Angelico. Ultimately, she saw the end of her rope with the epiphany that classical painting just wasn’t for her. She says that she enjoyed the knowledge that she gained, the palatability of the tones, the exoticism of the literature, but in the way some people seem take to musical instruments almost immediately and some don’t, for her she had reached a creative impasse. But it was a ripe place to be nonetheless, as it opened toward a new direction all her own.



Debutantes, acrylic on canvas, by Ayse Wilson

Her impetus to study classical painting was steeped in her unflagging, natural curiosity. She had an insatiable will to seek the knowledge of how the greats like Leonardo, Vermeer, Cézanne, even Pollock painted. Beneath them, she felt like a child, looking up in wonderment. She needed to know, but conversely it led her to the beginning, to the first, classical stroke against an empty canvas, what in the academy is known as the ‘imprimatura’, where the artist coats the blank surface to get a neutral ground that can then be lightened or darkened.

“I actually never got past that in certain paintings. I said, ‘Let’s just leave it there, because that’s the beginning of something but we don’t have to cover it up,’” said Wilson, laughing with her refreshing self-effacing sense of humor. She is now continuing that idea, immersed in the raw, initiatory technique to form her concept, departing from classical painting where it begins.

Since embarking on such a path that balances on the knife-edge of the contemporary and the classical, her critics have been many, pressing her to look beyond the preliminary. And she’s often interrogated about her choice of color, particularly the skin-tone blue that she applies to much of her work. But her logic lies in a mixture of classical tradition and postmodern critique. When painting in the classical style, a blue-green undertone is applied in contrast to give flesh colors more volume, especially when painting light, Caucasian pink flesh.



Rose, acrylic on canvas, 2020 by Ayse Wilson

It's also the case that she considers the concept of remaining true to a kind of pre-color palette, particularly when it comes to painting skin, as a comment on the fact that a lot of people don't have a specific flesh color. As she admits, similarly to diverting at the rudimentary *imprimatura* stage, she also never made it to painting the actual flesh color, choosing instead to remain focused on the undertone. It recalls the path to aesthetic ingenuity taken by the experimental composer John Cage, who, after being told by his teacher Arnold Schoenberg that he had no feeling for harmony and would come up against an impassible wall, replied that he would devote his life to beating his head against that wall.

"For all of us there's something underneath. I continue to explore that too. It's interesting to take these traditional methods and play around with them in your way. Often, it's been hard for me to depart from them. When you start saying to yourself, 'Well, it's supposed to be like this,' that's when you're supposed to throw it out of the window and say, 'There's no supposed to be.' That's a very dangerous place. Who says you're supposed to?" said Wilson, reflecting all of the rebellious qualities of growing up physically, mentally, creatively, drawing from motifs that she points to in her "Little Friends" show. In a narrative interpretation, her exhibitions at Pg chart the path of maturation, from the prenatal and infant development of Swimmers, to the childhood nostalgia of "when we were little" and the years leading up to adolescence in "Little Friends", which crystallized in her latest show, "Polaris" in 2017.



Turtlenecks, acrylic on canvas, by Ayse Wilson

While she consistently paints the female form at the center of her every show, her works aren't expressly feminist. Her art is personal, as is reiterated, a kind of window through which she reimagines her childhood, reflecting on the experience of becoming a new mother and growing as an artist in the city of Istanbul, where she taps into a trove of foundational memories. Only later does she contemplate how her individual mission might fit into the world. She is a woman, a mother, an artist, a communicator, but when it comes to being a feminist, she sees it as a behemoth topic that only intensifies her admiration for those who place it successfully in their work.

"I can't go to those marches. I get claustrophobic," she said, with blunt honesty, though not without a hint of comedy. "I made other contributions. Not that that's what feminism is all about but lately that's a manifestation of feminism, women's marches, and politics. But I think feminism is a great thing to be thinking about for whatever identity you have."

In between her last two solo shows, Wilson also participated in a group show with Pg, titled "Holistic", in 2016. She entered a curious painting that in many ways diverged from her concentration on the human form, although the imprimatura is striking for its bleak background resembling an icy blue, and snow white tundra. Her painting centered on the figure of an owlish, penguin-like character.



Purple owl, oil on canvas, 2019, by Ayse Wilson

“It’s sort of inspired by the toys I’m seeing in my house over the years. You know when you get a stuffed animal, and you’re like, ‘What is that? Is that a bird, or a dinosaur?’ There’s certain animals that are important to very young children. They’re the animals that stand out when you are learning about life. There are the obvious ones like cats and dogs, but there are really popular ones you always see made into toys like elephants, or giraffes,” she said. “Owls are something that people love, I think for their mythological meanings, like wisdom and mystery. There are some famous poems, like ‘The Owl and the Pussycat’ [by Edward Lear]. The owl is always the figure of knowledge, reason. Here we come back to the whole Apollonian thing.”

She is enamored with the barn owl especially, because to her it looks like a child, with its worried eyes. Full of quirky, bedtime tales, she remembers how when Harry Potter became popular everyone in the UK bought owls, and as soon as mass attention drifted, so did the owls, which were summarily released, causing a stir of unnatural flight in the English countryside. After all she confesses that she did in fact have a childhood interest in owls, an animal that she found to be almost iconic.

Since becoming an artist, she began painting owls, and has repeatedly done so, but not always as paintings to sell. She first wanted to hang them in her house only to see that people liked them, so she continued creating more portraits of the wise, enigmatic bird. One of her larger owl portraits enjoyed wide public appreciation in Istanbul during the group show “Critical Thinking” at the Hisar School Culture Center exhibition curated by Pg in 2017. For the show, she painted the owl exactly as she thought a child would draw it for an art class at school. It was a large piece, about six feet wide, and with a simple concept, relatively unsellable and not exactly purposed for commercial ends. She ended up donating it to the school as she felt it would be a great work for kids to see everyday.



Family reflection, acrylic on canvas, by Ayse Wilson

“And then I received the nicest letter from the school, the nicest letter I’ve ever received in my life saying how meaningful it was to have the piece of work, and how the kids were fascinated by it. They hoped that more artists would donate work. I just thought, ‘Thank God, that’s why you make art.’ Find a place for it that’s important,” said Wilson, proud of her achievement to have a piece permanently exhibited to improve the quality of life for children. “Kids will see that work and it will become part of their environment, and maybe make their day better. Sometimes seeing art can really cheer you up. It was a big achievement for me.”

With her most recent solo exhibition at Pg, titled “Polaris”, the young girl she often paints throughout the years had grown up even more to the extent that she was full of life and action, donning superhero costumes and brushing close with smartphone use. Wilson is aware of the autobiographical contents that her paintings might evoke by any interpretation, but she shies away from making direct reference to nonfiction elements in her works and progressions. Although, admittedly, she says with a laugh, “There’s probably something to that,” as one of her sons was aged parallel in many ways to the age of the child on her canvases in Polaris.

“With that show, I felt like I could care less if no one else likes it. To me as an artist, it looked really well put together,” said Wilson, who has a fine, curatorial eye, as she praised Polaris for the fact that it didn’t just look like something an artist had done haphazardly over the past two years, but it made a unified statement, aesthetically and in its subjects. “It looked really nice. When we were done painting the walls and installing it, I was so proud. I wanted to camp out for two weeks, and never leave. It was gorgeous. I loved it. I think a lot of the paintings sold, but it doesn’t matter. They just did. It was a good show.”



Disco Heart in Blue Green, acrylic on canvas, 2020, by Ayse Wilson

2017 was a difficult year, all the more so for the arts, as people grappled with the unstable political situation in Turkey, and its volatile repercussions. For an American artist, Wilson admired arts institutions like Pg who would march on regardless of the encircling tragedies, because, as she emphasized, “Art does matter.” Polaris was Wilson’s first show in Çukurcuma, where Pg had moved in part to avoid the turbulence on the street that was on the rise in the wake of escalating and often hostile conservatism. Underneath the gallery floor at her new space, PG is in the eye of the storm, where above all, it creates community.

In the midst of socializing in its bubbly depths, Wilson met the Pg artist Hasan Pehlevan, loved his work, and bought one of his pieces, as it was hanging on display. She told him flat out how much she appreciated the work, and he shot back: “Do you want to buy it?” She responded, “You’re not peddling carpets!” She realized the very next day that she did want to buy it, and so cursed him endearingly and made the arrangements.

“I’m trying to get Hasan over here to New York. Pg has a great group of artists, and it has grown. It was a different gallery ten years ago, and she knows that. 25 years ago for sure, because she gets in there, looks at work and responds to what she responds to and follows her heart and all that corny, sentimental stuff, but it works. It’s a gallery to be proud of. I look at the shows and wish I could be there,” said Wilson. “Pg could be in New York. It transcends a Turkish gallery, or an Istanbul gallery. It could be anywhere. And that’s what’s interesting about her artists. It’s nice for anyone to be able to say, ‘I’m an artist, not just a Turkish artist, or not just an American artist, whatever it is, I’m an artist.’ And you can say that about all of her artists. I like that and I think they like that too.”

The Milieu

“I actually had not spent a lot of time in Istanbul in the years leading up to 2007. I had gone quickly for weddings. I was spending a lot of time in London, working there for a while as a designer and other European countries, but not in Istanbul. I started to understand what was going on and how intensely it reminded me of a lot of other, large European cities, where artists connect because it’s a fascinating place,” said Wilson, who has also since begun to work with a new gallery in New York’s Lower East Side district called Geary, founded in 2013. “I’ve had this theme of working with gallerists who are starting galleries, probably because I have never been someone who chases people down to show my work. I’ve never been good at it. I’ve been a little shy, saying, ‘What do you think? Can we combine our efforts?’”



Untitled, oil on canvas, 2018, by Ayse Wilson

Despite having a relatively broad field of vision as an artist based in New York showing regularly at Pg for over a decade in Istanbul, she insists that, in fact, artists work alone so much. Counter to popular opinion, while artists generally have a large cultural footprint, the work itself largely emerges independent of the greater scene. Artists tend to create in solitude. The studio is typically a very private place, and to make the journey from creation to exhibition, with all of the social exchanges that it demands, is often difficult, even for group shows.

Wilson's work is thoroughly personal, as is common to artists, but for her, there is a certain shock at play when a painting that she'd spent long hours with alone is suddenly thrust into the buzzing ambiance of a show, where a friendly, drinking crowd is there to have fun and ask questions. "You feel naked, and the work is just there," she said. "I have it down by now, but it's a step people have to make. If you're too young and unready, or your work is not really yours and you're copying people or something, you just can't do it. That's why some 'make it' when they're older, or younger. You have to be able to survive there."

"Artists spend so much time doing their own work that they're focused on their own thing, that there is a general awareness and interest in seeing what's going on, but people always come back home, and New York is so big. There's so many galleries, museums, so many ways to see art. There's art in places you don't even expect to see it," said Wilson.



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 2021, by Ayse Wilson

“It’s fun to be a part of that, but I can’t help saying that there’s pressure from the commercial side in New York. You feel it just from the excitement of getting a sale. I feel lucky because people respond and whenever I have a show usually we sell. It would be hard if you didn’t. You’d feel like you might not have helped out your gallery because they make an investment in you.”

The reality is that most galleries don’t own their space. As Wilson confesses, it sometimes escapes young artists, like herself when she started out, just how important commerce is in maintaining the creative infrastructure of a city, or its particular aesthetic and conceptual milieus. There are costs that people involved in certain aspects of an arts show simply don’t think about, including the artist, especially in the realm of advertising and presentation. When a buyer walks in willing to pay often a lot of money for a piece of art, the effect on everyone on the side of the gallery is vital.

“It’s become a luxury, to buy an artwork. I do feel that New York has an emphasis on having a great show as being measured by selling work. Of course, it’s also about interesting people viewing it and talking about it. That’s the curatorial, intellectual side, but it always comes back to if you’re helping the gallery achieve their goals,” said Wilson, who recently enjoyed selling one of her paintings seven years after its exhibition. “You have to find your group in New York, not that Istanbul isn’t like that, but the art world is comparatively smaller. New York is the biggest art city these days. Now everyone’s moving to LA. It’s so established in New York. The galleries are full.”



Untitled, acrylic on paper, 2019, by Ayse Wilson

As a more seasoned artist, Wilson appreciates seeing younger artists that she follows make a great show, even if it's not in New York. At this point, it doesn't matter, because the melting pot is overflowing. In terms of Wilson's career, it has meant that she, in turn, has chosen to work with a new gallery. The address books of the established galleries are practically overwritten with all of the names they need to be sustainable. Handling such skyscraping overheads, new names pose a greater risk than anyone is willing to take at that level.

"There are different spheres of confidence that you have in your life. You have the confidence to get up in the morning. You have the confidence to say, 'I'm going to finish this work I'm doing.' You have the confidence to know that it's worthwhile," said Wilson. "And then you have to have the confidence to share it. That's hard as an artist, sharing your work with anyone, not just somebody who's going to put it up in their gallery and show it to the world. You have to arrive at that stage."

Sibel Tomruk is an art writer in Mersin, Turkey



Master of the Black Leaf
On the Art of Devran Mursaloğlu
by Aysun Bloom



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper on canvas, 100x100 cm, 2020

Introduction

The rumble of concrete breaking under the claws of mammoth machines could be heard from the guarded entrance into a bare, dusty building that rose up from a cool, cavernous parking garage and ascended into blank tiles and unwashed glass.

Outside, the propagandized, overburdened renewal of Tarlabası went on within earshot of the masses, where east Anatolian migrants glance backwards at the hot, trudging sweep of human forms, Roma families, Arab shopkeepers, African workers, Kurdish people-watchers, European vagrants.

They walked to and from life against the jarring crash of corrugated metal walls stung with the fuming shards of the city that turned from the ground up with the hope that it would welcome newcomers with a smile, a home, a community.

Inside its shadowy, neon haunts, a class of artists waited and wondered if it would grow into a nexus for creative regeneration. Its winding slopes spilled out into the freeway where galleries beckoned, where museums emerged.



Devran Mursalođlu. Untitled, paper on canvas, 100x100 cm, 2020 (Detail)

The streets seethed with a writhing potency, something that could prove to authenticate the sincerity of art-making in Turkey. And the artists stole back into its buildings of rooms, silent, unadorned. Submerged in fluorescent light, surrounded by whitewash corners and industrial flooring, one artist sat in her studio, flashing a kind grin and offering a plastic cup of tea.

All about were strewn long stems of twisted, black paper, then in strips, framed, cut, folded, and manipulated in every which way the mind can fathom.

Devran Mursaloğlu lit a thin cigarette, and calmed her nerves. She would retrace her most subtle lines of thought and the patterns that have issued from her hands during her very young career as an artist who opened her first solo exhibition at Pg Art Gallery in 2012 with “knots” at the daring age of 49.

Mursaloğlu is a quirky artist, a deeply introspective and modest sort when it comes to her work, despite her powerful repute as a craftswoman with a global conscience for making novel art.

Ten years before her first exhibition, Pg proposed a collaboration after seeing some of her works at her atelier shop in Sabancı Museum. Mursaloğlu wasn't selling them. She was simply giving pieces away as gifts, although she had graduated from her night art school courses at Marmara University.



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 20x18 cm, 2019

At that point in her creative and personal development she did not see herself as an artist, but as something of a mix between decorator, designer, and artist. She warmly declined, and laughs at how she closed the phone when Pg initially asked.

In retrospect, why she later accepted a decade later remains a mystery to her even today. Looking back, she felt encouraged to pursue a career in art after her second solo show at Pg, titled, “Night Butterflies” in 2014, due to the quality of attention from critics and collectors in Istanbul.

“In Bebek, Pg worked with good, name artists like Kezban Arca Batıbeki and Tayfun Erdogmus. When I started with Pg, I saw that more than 15% were young, like Candas Sisman, Kerem Ozan Bayraktar and Elsa Ers. What I liked is that she gives a chance to the young artist. This is difficult, and risky. I have good communications with the young artists, even though they use computers, and I don’t even use scissors,” said Mursaloğlu, with her deadpan humor.

“The young artists ask me questions about my art with computer terms. I say, ‘No, I make it with my hands. I make everything with my hands.’ They say, ‘Wow!’ Kerem and Candas make art with light and sound, but they love my work. It’s good for me, my work is young.”

Installations

Mursaloğlu began working with Pg, when they invited her to participate in a mixed exhibition called “Uncanny Games” at the Tahtakale Hamam in 2011. It was a prestigious show, featuring the likes of Komet and other anti-pop artists, as well as Kemal Tufan, Gunnur Ozsoy, Ayla Turan, and Jerome Symons among many others.

Mursaloğlu made a large installation with paper, exclusively her chosen medium. And although almost repressively afraid, because her first education is not as an artist, she gradually accepted when more invitations came in. Mursaloğlu had studied civil engineering in Brussels, concentrating her talents for the purposes of construction, but soon she found herself at Marmara University, learning to make contemporary art under teachers who would also become fellow artists, Devabil Kara and Tayfun Erodgmus.

She earned a night school certificate, but still, she did not really feel like an artist. Before earning gallery representation, Devran was a designer at the Sabancı Museum shop, working out of its boutique gallery where she enjoyed a freedom and happiness well outside of the aspirational pressures of the core art world.



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 32,5 x 41,5 cm, 2019

She never thought of working with a gallery as an individual artist. She feared the spotlight because she did not identify as an artist. “I’m working very, very hard, but I don’t like to be in the window, now also. It’s not my character, but I said yes. The same year, six months later, I made my first exhibition. It was very risky, very difficult,” Mursaloğlu explained.

In 2018, she skipped her usual biannual exhibition month of May, as her series of works were not ready for show. Her gallery did not meddle. Her meticulous, intuitive grasp across the concepts of her design demand a special respect for her eccentric processes, given to caprice and variation at every turn, though chockfull of deliberate and decisive potency.

It ultimately makes for riveting interpretive adaptation, from curation to critique, acquisition to installation. Fifteen to twenty years before working with Pg, after finishing her evening studies at Marmara University, she had shown art at the first Mardin Biennial in 2010.

She also made an exhibition that she’s particularly proud of for the sixth international Ege Art in 2015 in Izmir, for which her work she received distinction as the best paper installation. “Now I want to stop,” she said, sitting inside her studio, absorbed in the postmodern air of Dolapdere. “I’m afraid. I don’t like to make new things every two years. I make what I want. I don’t think if they’re sellable. Pg says I’m one of her best selling artists. It’s very minimal, what I do.”

Her use of the word “minimal” to describe her work is significant, in terms of the greater aesthetic and conceptual reality in which her artist colleagues work. It could be said that Gunnur Özsoy’s neo-minimalism, Kemal Tufan’s archaism, and Ayşe Turan’s post-classicism align to Mursaloğlu’s characteristic relationship between traditional paper craft, and its techniques, as inspiration for her utterly contemporary approach to installation art.



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 55x80 cm, 2016

And further alike is her extensive knowledge base of the classical methods and their relation to creative societies today, while remaining profoundly individualist and even standoffish to a degree, dedicated to herself foremost as the progenitor of her new ideas.

“I don’t understand sales, money,” said Mursaloğlu, as she discussed her first solo show, “knots” in which she used brown paper, afterwards shifting to black only. For eight years and running, she's only worked with paper, and always black. She says that she has no need for variations of color. If she tries to branch out in that direction, she soon finds herself recoiling.

For her, it’s all about form and structure. Some people have labeled her work design more than an art, considering her background in a museum shop. But for her, there are no boundaries. Definition is relative. And she is not merely talk, as when she started out as an artist her works immediately entered a good collection.

Her pieces are often titled after pop culture references, like a book, film, or song. It’s one of her signatory marks. For the Uncanny Games show, for example, she named her installation after the postwar French filmmaker Rene Clement’s opus, “Jeux interdits” (“Forbidden Games”). And similarly, “Night Butterflies” (“Gece Kelebekleri”) is taken from a banned Turkish novel by Haydar Karataş, who is currently living in exile in Switzerland.

She had read the book, appreciating its backstory in the hotly conflicted province of Dersim, now known as Tunceli, though she is not explicit about the political issues behind her choice of title. Especially for “Night Butterflies” she is proud of the quality of her work primarily in the context of art. It helped that the entire show sold into a good collection. Many people were put-off by its decorative look, but Mursaloğlu defends her work simply as good art, without the need to elaborate.



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 57 x 62 cm, 2020

There were some who decried Mursaloğlu's "Night Butterflies" as unoriginal, as some big name artists consistently use the butterfly, with one highlight being Damien Hirst's "In and Out of Love" (2012), a piece categorically defamed as "atrocious art" for the fact that the artist apparently killed over 9,000 butterflies in his process.

But still, she does not succumb to short-sighted, trendy criticism. Finally, she named her 2016 exhibition, "All We Ever Wanted Was Everything" after the song by Bauhaus. She made a video installation with 10,000 black paper stones, which took a year to produce with an assistant. "I like the repetition of the same material," said Mursaloğlu, who was then in the process of making new works, in her home studio.

As an older artist, she feels that she has less of an opportunity to make mistakes, whereas the younger artists are free to take major risks and can get away with one bad exhibition knowing that with time they will regain new life. While time may not be on her side, she doesn't let that get in the way of her artistic process. Her works appear to be painstakingly time-consuming with respect to the intricacy of the slightest hand-made detail, the unrestrained use of repetition, and the amount of technical research that she pours into her craft from every known tradition of paper art around the world.

"I think sometimes that I don't have so long, but the young artists in the gallery say, 'No, it doesn't matter,'" she said. "It's something very heavy for me, and everyone I think. I am someone who speaks directly, others are more controlled. It's my character. All of my work is black. I take this life very objectively. I don't know what my work is exactly when I finish it. It is something uncontrollable."



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 69x84 cm, 2019

One of her recent exhibitions was part of the group show, “Pictures of Nothing” at Pg. And although she has an admirable and respectable following among curators and artists, she is unsure about how many times her work will appear again. She is essentially indifferent to fame and art. Her exhibition at the Mardin Biennial, and Ege Art were completely different than the experience of holding solo shows in a gallery.

In Mardin, for example, the curator Döne Otyam and art critic Ayşegül Sönmez gave a lot of energy to her participation. Even though she prefers such collective settings, so as not to be in the forefront, she still stayed behind on the opening day in Mardin, as she had worked for three weeks in solitude, with one assistant, and was relieved when her project concluded.

“When I finish, it’s finished for me. After, it’s for the visitor to like or not like, which I respect. Working is something you do very alone. Sometimes you lose what you do, so you need someone, but someone good who will say, ‘Yes, it’s good,’ or not,” said Mursaloğlu. Normally, I want to make bigger works. I think my mixed shows are better.”

Media

“I’m a little bit repetitive,” she says repeatedly. “I like repetition.” Her teachers Devabil Kara and Tayfun Erodgmus first taught her the art of paper at Marmara University. Initially educated in the field of construction, she would apply her skills to an open-ended setting in her garden, and work creatively with stones and cement. She liked construction material, but after seeing Erdogmus make art with paper under the influence of Kara, she also started making paper for artistic purposes.

The only obstacle was that she needed a big bathroom in her atelier, as paper-making requires immediate access to a lot of water and large, ceramic containers. She had realized then that great paper-makers need time and money, so, she now also buys all kinds of readymade paper, from ambalaj to carton, depending on what she wants to do.

While she does know how to make paper, she pauses when her ideas necessitate large sheets of material, as that demands a mill, and space for a basin. Still, she is perpetually scheming, setting her sights on the resourcefulness of Anatolian village life for future works.

She often travels the globe with her husband, a film buff, traversing the regions of China, India, Nepal, Thailand, Korea, Peru. Everywhere she takes paper, exposing herself to traditional paper crafts. She believes Japan is the best in paper art.



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 73x73 cm, 2020

“In their culture there is paper,” she explained. “And there is beautiful paper in Japan. In Turkey, you can not find more than white paper. The material doesn’t exist in our country, but for some works you don’t need good paper. If you are creative, you don’t need it to be handmade. I can work with ambalaj, carton, or very expensive handmade paper. I never think of going to Japan, or Korea, to learn their traditions, because it’s their traditions.”

In one room in her studio, she has stored paper from all over the world. Her stories speak from the textures and shades of the pages that surround her, revealing the stunning, innate diversity of the fibrous sheets, long before the temptation rose to impress anything onto it. Before the crafts of writing or art were applied to paper, there was just the art of the paper itself. One of her works is a book of paper, bound in India, exemplifying one potent display of her mind and her peculiar knack for conceptual play. It includes about 60 handmade leaves of paper in tones of white and beige, each from a different country.

“Bookbinding is also something, but it’s artisanal. I know how to make it, but for me art is about concept, and what I’ll do. I can work with all kinds of paper. I’ve liked the look of writing, and calligraphy so much,” said Mursaloğlu, who appears to have practiced everything under the sun in relation to paper craft, from post-literate asemic writing to traditional origami.

“I used Ottoman calligraphy in my museum shop works. I like lines, a little bit similar to writing. To see paper very close is too interesting.”



Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 73x83 cm, 2019

As a French speaker, having received her formal education in the language since entering Francophone primary school and through university in Brussels, she is an active part of the multilingual art world. She has built her professional, international networks with IAPMA, the acronym for the International Association of Hand Papermakers and Paper Artists.

When she was independent and working from her atelier shop, she had more time to connect with like-minded artists, even participating in mixed exhibitions around the world. That was before she exhibited her work.

In Turkish, identifying as a “paper artist” doesn’t make immediate sense. It simply denotes something of a contemporary artist. From a global perspective, the term “paper artist” has merit. For instance, there is the Holland Paper Biennial, in the Dutch town of Rijswijk. She was regularly invited to the biennial until she began working primarily with Pg, but she remains proud to say that she has many colleagues and friends in the field of paper art.

Framing is also an important element to her works, particularly with respect to its commerciality. She is now looking for ways to remove the frame from her works for aesthetic and technical reasons so that she can venture into greater scales and proportions. The paper itself, and even her chosen shade of black is part of her handmade intimacy with the material. She rarely goes to the store during her creative process.

For her, material is simply a function of form. Among other total transformations of her medium, she fills containers with kilos and kilos of specially-made powdered paper, for which she needs the trusty help of her assistants. But despite the intensity and originality of her process, she often leaves behind odds and ends of ideas and starts before coming to the realization of a piece to exhibit. She typically takes a minimum of one year to make the creative decisions that go into producing a new work.

“I’m not clean. I’m a little bit dirty, and after I make it very aesthetic,” she said. “I’m not political. I’ll say everything. I’m very natural. All artists feel the same, but everyone is afraid and wants to be better. I’m not young, but I have time. I craft designs because that is also technique, because I don’t have an education in paper making, or in paper art. It’s something I understand, and learned alone. I think I know all of the paper techniques, but my work is not very technical. I’m a little dirty, black and dirty. In paper, big is good, and repetition because it’s a simple, poor material. You need to be decorative and artful, because the material is paper, it’s cheap, delicate, and difficult.”

She practices popular paper crafts like origami and papier-mâché to distill its techniques, and to later apply, deform and adapt them to her conceptual, contemporary art. In Turkey, however, there is little to no material for paper artists. She remembers seeing a work at the Venice Biennial that had clearly drawn from origami, folding techniques, but the originality was in the sheer size of the paper. The technique was simple, but the paper itself was the focus. In that way she adores the Korean paper sculptor Chun Kwang Young.

“I am not making paper. I am an artist. For this reason, in Turkish, I don’t like the name ‘paper artist’. I am a contemporary artist,” she said. “Tomorrow, I can use another material. Everybody changes. I think I will keep working in black, with paper. If my gallery wants me, I will continue.”

Words

Mursaloglu does not entertain gossip, especially in the guise of pseudo-intellectual criticism in the Turkish art scene. What she hates more than anything is the first day at her exhibitions, the opening.

“When you are in the window, all the critics come, good and bad. I accept negative criticism, but I think in our country there aren’t any negative critics, they use humiliation,” she said, appreciating the criticism that she’s received from one of her good friends, the artist Kerem Ozan Bayraktar.

In Turkey it is often only other artists who provide their fellow artists with truly constructive feedback about each other’s works. Mursaloğlu recognizes that Bayraktar is unafraid to tell her what’s not working when she experiments with new approaches in her art, and she respects his opinions because he knows exactly where to encourage her to stimulate creative growth and fresh perspectives.

As the weather warms, her atelier becomes emptier as she moves her materials and works-in-progress to her home studio, where she relaxes unfazed by the incessant chatter of the saturated, cultural scene and its instant, global interconnectivity.

“Every opening of mine, I say that I don’t want to come,” she said with a few laughs, admitting that she doesn’t understand exactly why her works sell so well. “My last opening began at around 8 in the evening, I had to go to New York the next morning at 5 o’ clock. I don’t stay at the opening. After the work, it’s about sale. It’s not art. If there’s someone who wants to interview, or a really good collector who’s interested, okay, but sorry if it’s just about commerce. You are not in MoMA or Tate, this is a gallery.”





Devran Mursaloğlu. Untitled, paper, 104,5x72,5 cm, 2019

Her first show, “knots” was held in Bogazkesen. As she considers the changes that Pg went through from Bebek before she exhibited, to the downtown scene in Tophane, there are dramatic shifts, not only in the art, but in the entire cultural reality of Istanbul as an arts city. From time to time, she would go to Bebek, where she enjoyed the high caliber of the artworks, but it was the case that only a single visitor might show up during the day.

But after the move, Pg reeled in countless pairs of eyes who hungrily roamed about the nearby Istanbul Modern and neighboring galleries. For “knots”, Pg confirmed that about 1,000 people showed up for her opening on May 22, 2012.

“In the time of Bebek, contemporary art was very difficult. For example, we would go to Contemporary Istanbul and nothing sold. Nowadays, with Instagram, people who were never interested in art, now go to Frieze. The people seem interested now in art in Istanbul. Every year is better. Before, not so many people were interested in art. It’s good,” said Mursaloğlu, who is not convinced that her studio neighborhood of Dolapdere will become a new center for arts appreciation in Istanbul.

“Bebek is an interesting area for rich people, but people know Beyoğlu for its art. But it hasn’t been stable. Bogazkesen finished. People left Karakoy. In Istanbul, there is no art area. In Turkey, we don’t have the spirit of SoHo, Chelsea. For this reason, all of the galleries move in five or six years to where it’s a la mode. It never continues.”

A kindred artist exhibiting in Istanbul is Sinan Logie, who she enjoys. He acquired one of her works after exhibiting together at Pg’s 2014 group show, titled, “[]”, where they

discovered many life parallels and mutual inspirations in each other's art. Logie, for example, is an architect, and was born in Brussels.

"We have the same origin. He's also in engineering. We make construction. I make repetitions of material, but at the end it's something constructive," she said, thinking about the show "[]", where the artists were prompted to exhibit artist books. Mursaloğlu produced hers, a compendium of techniques, and framed works from it. Logie made a digital piece, framed into his tablet.

When Mursaloğlu started her first design shop, she was based in Çukurcuma. She swears that twenty years ago when she worked there, it was a prime district famed for its antique shops, cafes, architects, artists. But by her account, everyone from that time has since left. Her atelier had become a popular destination, but that's all in the past. It was a golden time that came and went.

Sometimes, she sees rifts between younger and older artists in Istanbul. She has no problem contributing to exhibitions that merge high art with popular entertainment. "I take it very serious when I work, but when I'm finished I don't take it seriously. I'm not about high art and low art," she said. "Time will tell. We are in the now. In 100 years, we will see what I am, and what the other is."

Aysun Bloom is a journalist and artist from Las Vegas, Nevada.



Cuneiform Tweets

by Berkay Tuncay



Untitled (Study for Kanye's Tweets no.2) by Berkay Tuncay

The work contains a selection of tweets which were sent by Kanye West between 2012-2017 and focuses particularly on the subjects such as contemporary art, the definition of art and being an artist. To form a fictional speech, these particular tweets were collected from the total of 997 and written on clay tablets with Sumerian cuneiform writing.

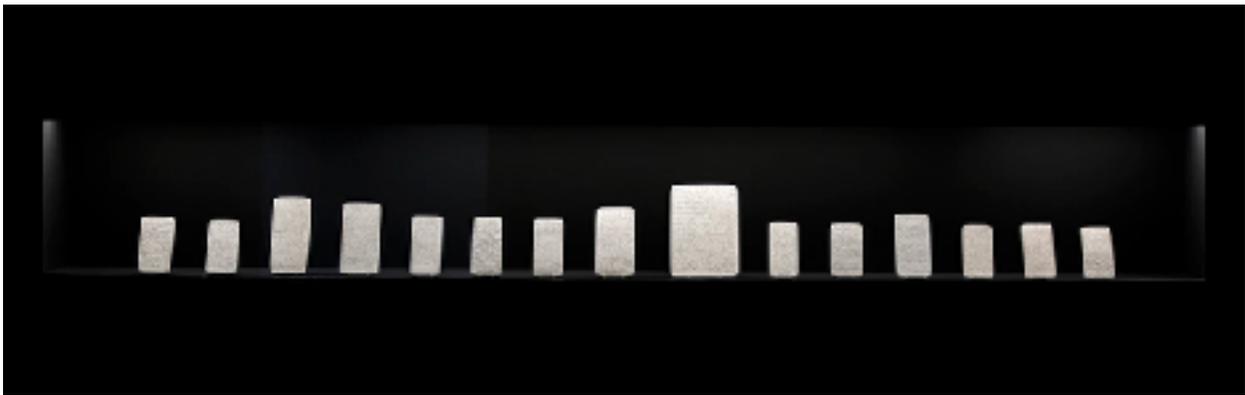
The project compares Sumerian Cuneiform tablets, as they were the first system of writing and an information tool with social media sites such as Twitter where the text can be experienced most commonly in our age. This futile effort of bringing together is rather a transliteration than a translation. It is also a conscious attempt to pertain a historical anachronism.



Untitled (Study for Kanye's Tweets no.2) by Berkay Tuncay

The journey that began with demigod Gilgamesh's definition of "reaching the immortality for humankind is to leave a great name behind and to transfer the knowledge to next generations" is continuing its evolution nowadays on the internet by the help of the pop-culture-extolled phenomena and leaders with their 'followers', 'tweets', retweets' and 'likes'.

Apart from their stylistic and functional properties, Sumerian tablets which are accepted as the origin of the history, resembles electronic tablets and smart phones which we use to read the 'text' extensively in the present day. Given this similarity, the tablets in this work are produced based on the dimensions of iPhone and iPad models produced by Apple.



Untitled (Study for Kanye's Tweets no.2) by Berkay Tuncay

[Berkay Tuncay edited the following text based on a series of tweets by Kanye West]

"Hi Grammys this is the most important living artist talking. First thing is I'm an artist and as an artist I will express how I feel with no censorship. Stop trying to demonize real artist Stop trying to compromise art.

I'm an artist... the definition of art - or at least my definition - is to be able to see the truth and then express it...

I am of service to the world with my art and I just want to serve more. I know so many cool artists whose hearts have been broken by the politics including mine. - I want to help the world and I need help to do it. I am an artist and I care about humanity.

on another note... I was thinking about getting an Instagram but only on one condition. no one can ask me or try to tell me what to Instagram... It's my art...My tweets are a form of contemporary art only compromised by people trying to tell me what to tweet and not to tweet...

In Roman times the artist would contemplate proportions and colors. Now there is only one important color... Green. If I spent my money on my ideas I could not afford to take care of my family. I am in a place that so many artist end up. Power to the people. Power to the artist. Empower the artist and create a more inspired world.

Together we stand... we win...

the future thinkers win...

the artists win...

the thinkers win

the pure of heart win...

we win

And I love you like Kanye loves Kanye

With love and respect,

Kanye West."

Berkay Tuncay was born in 1983 in Istanbul. He studied in the Archaeological Restoration and Conservation Department at Istanbul University, and later at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in the Computer Aided Art and Design Department. His artwork has been shown in solo exhibitions at Sanatorium and Gaia Gallery in Istanbul and Display in Berlin. His artwork, "Untitled (Study of Kanye's Tweets no. 2) was shown at Contemporary Istanbul 2021 via Sanatorium. He lives and works in Istanbul.

Contributors



Berkay Tuncay was born in 1983 in Istanbul. He studied in the Archaeological Restoration and Conservation Department at Istanbul University, and later at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in the Computer Aided Art and Design Department. His artwork has been shown in solo exhibitions at Sanatorium and Gaia Gallery in Istanbul and Display in Berlin. His artwork, "Untitled (Study of Kanye's Tweets no. 2)" was shown at Contemporary Istanbul 2021 via Sanatorium. He lives and works in Istanbul.

Renan Koen is a Turkish-Jewish concert pianist, music therapist and public educator. Since the release of her 2015 album, "Holocaust Remembrance / Before Sleep", she has toured the world lecturing on the



Holocaust, specifically Theresienstadt and the composers interned there with youth groups, and recently to a global audience in January 2020 at the UN Headquarters in NYC for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Earlier in her career, she released, "Lost Traces, Hidden Memories" (2014), an album of Ladino music, inspired by her heritage,

raised among the Sephardic communities of Istanbul. Her recent album, "March of the Music", was released in July of 2021, accompanied by her new book, "Positive Resistance".



Tosh Hayashi is a flamenco aficionado, guitar practitioner, sporadic doodler, and fiction dabbler based in Calgary, Canada



Eleni Papadopoulou is a photojournalist in Nicosia, Cyprus



Alex Butler is a nurse in the operating rooms at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, specializing in the trauma and oncology unit. He is an avid reader and writer, living in Somerville, where he enjoys cooking with his wife, Allison.



*Cem Ozuduru was born in 1987 in Istanbul. After entering the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, he published two graphic novels, *Zombistan* (2008) and *Dawn Frost* (2010) leading up to his graduation in 2010. His professional career continued with short stories, movie scripts, and directing, on top of creating comic books. His work in the movies and television includes the scripts for the horror movie *Baskın* (2015), *Housewife* (2017), the TV series *Wolf* (2017), and the feature film *Wolf* (2018), with him directing the latter two. His other credits in comics include *Once Upon a Time on the Soccer Field* (2015) and *Periban* (2017; Europe Comics 2020). *Periban* was adapted to a movie in 2019 under the title "The Girl with No Mouth," winning several awards. His latest book is *Solo, Night Hunger and Other Stories*.*



Sanaz Ghorbani is a Paris-based dance artist originally from Tebran. She is a movement researcher in contemporary salsa, and also filmmaking. She studies at ACTS école de danse contemporaine and is the founder of @movement.for.growth