

istanbulCOOL!

What's happening in Contemporary Turkish Art now

istanbulcool!

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istanbul Cool! is dedicated in loving memory of Ali Can Ertug (1973-2010)

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Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey

by Maryam Homayoun Eisler
London, May 2010

Istanbul Cool! is a visual feast encapsulating the vibrancy and buzz of contemporary art from Turkey. I applaud Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller's untiring energy and continuous initiatives in trying to develop and support the arts of the near and Middle East with zest and zeal, whilst platforming the importance and aesthetic beauty of the region's art and culture.

On a personal note, I have been part of a whirlwind adventure this past year, an intellectual and sensory journey throughout Turkey, encompassing its history and current socio-cultural dynamics. The result: a co-publication by TransGlobe Publishing and Thames & Hudson of **Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey** (released in April). In this light, I would like first and foremost to thank Hossein Amirsadeghi not only for the opportunity which he gave me to contribute editorially to his book, but more importantly for his friendship and trust. Thanks are also due to my other dear friends and colleagues on the project, Berna Tuglular, Ipek Nur Cem Taha and Jason Lee, without whose efforts *Unleashed* would not be what it is today. And, to Ali Can Ertug, whose artistic passion, selfless contribution and undivided friendship will be sorely missed – never forgotten.

I suppose the first question that many may want answered is: Why this new and sudden interest in contemporary art from Turkey?

Any such answer is necessarily multi-layered. The greater near and Middle East region has historically been at the vanguard of cultural activity in world civilisation. Led by Iran and Turkey, this geographic expanse has long been considered a bastion of art and creativity. More recently, and despite the most challenging of socio-political circumstances, we have been witness to a remarkable artistic and cultural revival – possibly a result of these very intensely troubled economic and political forces driving the region.

Turkey, with its rich Ottoman heritage, has in recent years gone through drastic political and economic changes with principal focus placed on its entry into the E.U. But, there has also been a constructive effort on the part of the country to secure itself the image of an open and liberal Muslim democracy. As the country struggles to redefine itself within the new world order, it has attracted considerable international attention, making Istanbul one of the most interesting cultural centres in the wider region – a city straddling the divides between East and West as no other city can, present or past.

Strong proof of this cultural resurgence can be found in the realms of film and music, with many international awards won in the last ten years. Examples include Nuri Bilge Ceylan's Best Director Award in the 2008 Cannes Film Festival for *Three Monkeys*. Other examples include Fatih Akin's 2004 Berlin Golden Bear Award for his film *Head On* and his 2007 Cannes Best Screenplay Award for *Edge of Heaven*. Akin's 2005 documentary *Crossing the Bridge: the Sound of Istanbul* further demonstrates the city's unusually diverse and rich musical subculture.

Increasingly, the same developments are now evidenced in the field of visual arts. Principal amongst these is the growing importance of the much-respected Istanbul Biennial, which, this year alone, drew a record crowd of 100,000 of art lovers, artists and curators from around the globe. A project of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Art (IKSV), the Istanbul Biennial shows what can be achieved in the region with private initiative and proper execution.

Fikret Atay's and Emre Huner's works now reside in the collection of the Tate Modern, and Kutlug Ataman was nominated for the prestigious Turner Prize. The market for Turkish contemporary art itself has defied the recent economic downturn, as collectors flock to buy pieces by talented artists, both residing in the country as well as among the diaspora – at prices considered "still affordable" within the context of the global art market. An ever-growing number of commercial Turkish contemporary exhibitions now travel the globe from Dubai to London, Paris and New York with their associated dedicated sales, in both local and international auction houses. The Turkish gallery presence is also felt strongly from Basel to Hong Kong, whilst a new, dedicated annual international art fair, *Contemporary Istanbul*, has now been launched in the city.

What excites me, as a lover and observer of the arts, is the fresh and novel approach to art by Turkish contemporary artists. Forty percent of the artists whom we profiled in *Unleashed* are non-gallery affiliated. These artists are either independent or function via artist collectives, creating highly conceptual and often non-commercial works offering a solid institutional fit. It is therefore refreshing in this ever-competitive and profit-minded global art market to find such artists – their philosophies and ambitions based on art for art's sake alone. It will be interesting to see how these attitudes will evolve in the long-term.

It is important to note additionally that creative forces are bubbling all over the country with concentrated pockets of intellectual and artistic activity in Izmir, Ankara and Diyarbakir, in addition to Istanbul of course, with each region displaying unique local sensitivities and creative impulses.

When looking at thematic content, Turkey's contemporary art, in all its variety and richness, is neither Middle Eastern nor European in flavour. Its principal interests deal with routine community-led issues closely linked to politics, youth, gender and minority rights. Ideas highlight the dichotomy surrounding secular as opposed to religious tendencies, between modernity and tradition, but

also migration versus immigration in the context of urbanisation. All this is under the greater umbrella of identity, individuality, belonging and nationalism, not to mention the basic notion of what it really means to be “Turkish.”

In today’s Turkey, artistic expression often pushes the envelope with strong sexual, political or religious content, themes which are discussed without censorship, especially in recent years. This free approach to artistic dialogue is particularly poignant given that the explosion of the contemporary art movement in Turkey dates back to the 1980s, a time historically highlighted by socio-artistic interaction between non-violent protest as opposed to a politics of repression and oppressive traditions.

Istanbul, 2010 European Capital of Culture, pulsates with genuine cultural excitement. Additionally and equally worthy of note is the relationship between artistic initiative and private capital. The lack of direct government support and funding has almost worked to the betterment and progress of the country’s cultural renewal, as such allowing the artistic community to criticise social and political issues in a free and independent manner.

The Turkish experience indeed underlines the importance of the private and corporate sectors in the propagation of cultural progress. As such, it can serve as an excellent case study for successful replication in the rest of the region. Examples of enterprising private initiatives in Turkey include Istanbul Modern, the brain child of the Eczacıbasi family; Elgiz Family’s Proje4L contemporary art space; the Sabancı-led AkbankSanat – cultural arm to Akbank; Platform Garanti, in turn Garanti Bank’s cultural extension, and last but not least Yapı Kredi Kultur, a function of the Koc family owned Yapı Kredi bank. Other private initiatives include the newly established ARTER contemporary art space (also initiated by the Koc family), and private corporate initiatives such as those led by BORUSAN with Ahmet Kocabiyik at its helm, two examples among many.

Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey therefore comes at a time of growing intellectual and socio-political interest in Turkey. With over 100 artist profiles and 900 colour illustrations, the book is the first reference book of its kind in quality, production and content on the topic. It touches upon the complex issues of identity, contemporaneity and the relationship between Turkish art as set against international artistic trends. As such, the book is a widely anticipated tool among art lovers, collectors, commercial galleries and institutional organisations alike.

In conclusion, a new memory is being stamped in Turkey’s cultural arena and the marriage today of **Istanbul Cool!** and **Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey** is strong proof of the renaissance of Turkish creative outpour, one which no doubt is here to stay – novel, unencumbered and passionate.

Artist Index

Serkan Adin	13
Haluk Akakçe	14
Vahap Avsar	15
Kezban Arca Batibeki	16
Ramazan Bayraköglü	17
Gökçe Çelikel	18
Taner Ceylan	19
Ahmet Elhan	20
Extramücadele	21
Mustafa Horasan	22
Peter Hristoff	23
Gözde ilkin	24
Burhan Kum	25
Bahar Oganer	26
Soner Ön	27
İrfan Önürmen	28
Arif Özakça	29
Sefa Sağlam	30
Yasam Şaşmaz	31
Gölay Semercioğlu	32
Canan Şenol	33
Erinç Seymen	34
Hale Tenger	35
Nazif Topçuoğlu	36
Elif Uras	37
Ebru Uygun	38
Halil Vurucuoğlu	39
Ekrem Yalçındağ	40

istanbul Cool: Turkish Contemporary Art at Close Proximity

By Sefa Saglam
Director of Exhibitions, Neue Galerie, NY
New York, May 2010



Turkey's geography and turbulent structure provides an excellent ground for the subjects of identity, religion or political turmoil to be explored. Its prominent entry into the contemporary art scene in recent years is perhaps underpinned by a renewed curiosity and acceptance towards emerging economies, which supported the establishment of a more equalizing context for the display of work from these geographies. This exhibition is the result of a common ambition among a small group of individuals hoping to provide a glimpse into the work of artists from Turkey, including many who gained international acclaim in recent years.

While some of the artists presented here were busy harboring consciousness visibly and seemingly unrelated to art, many have pursued a consistent practice of art making. Despite the reference made by its title, only several of the participating artists work and live in Istanbul, but most participants enjoy exposure through common outlets positioned in this marvelous city. For some of the artists, this exhibition provides an opportunity to re-encounter their peers, constituting a meeting of vastly different experiences fostered by similar circumstances. The space is rather residual and humble, setting ground for potential surprises of unsought intimacy. The exhibition is not after satisfying a curatorial argument, or a survey, which would provide a more organized and selective viewing. It positions itself behind the firm belief that the artwork is autonomous in its nature, no matter what is placed next to it, whether in a neighboring or engaging fashion.

This exhibition also provides an opportunity to take stock of how the widespread interest in contemporary Turkish Art influenced the work of artists since the early 1990s in comparison to more recent work. Back in the 90s most of the artists practicing in Turkey were not interested in employing religious references, or traditional forms adopted into the current climate as valid representations. And while there have been many recently successful attempts to display such subjects in a less realistic way, back then there was a resistance to the urge to use symbols that would easily identify the artists as part of "the other" within the norms of art from Islamic countries. As we all have witnessed, the events of 9/11 turned a completely different page on the discourse of the "other," which, coupled with greater opportunities and wider access, resulted in more courageous and playful exercises of local iconography. The works made by Elif Uras, Arif Özakça and Canan Şenol are a clear demonstration of these exercises, while the work of Peter Hristoff goes a step further by exploring the issue of identity through the use of collectively produced traditional craft (carpets and kilims), resulting in a very intimate experience. The blending of artistic concerns with craft finds many more examples within the younger generation as well, such as in the work of Gözde İlkin, who embroiders stories in colorful threads. Other artists from the younger generation, such as Bahar Oganer, Halil Vurucuoğlu, and Gözde Çelikel share similar interests in putting forth their obsession with the subjects of popular culture, while works of their seniors seem to share a concern in a deeper investigation of the intellectual realm. Still, their tendencies don't seem to be far placed from those of Ramazan Bayraktar, who relies on a strong backbone of figurative skill to transform an almost photographic taste of the retina into something far more interesting and three dimensional. Ekrem Yalçındağ, on the other hand, has shown considerable success over the years with well executed canvases or wall works that discuss the trajectories of ornamentation. In comparison, Haluk Akakçe's work employed a wider variety of methods, such as flat work, installation, and video art to display his many facets as an artist, like a chameleon full of surprises.

Probably of the most poignant display of identity explorations is found in Taner Ceylan's work, through explicit and homosexual imagery. Named by many as the most impressive hyperrealist Turkish painter of our time, it is not surprising to learn that he was suspended from the university where he worked because of one of his paintings.

The artist collective, Extramücadele, presents an attempt that does not rely on the individuality of the artists, but rather on a collective effort and voice to address current issues, supported heavily by humor and political imagery. This type of collaboration increased considerably in recent years.

While the biennials enabled long standing support from international curators to flourish, the formation of independent spaces and platforms for the discussion and exhibition of contemporary art contributed to create a widespread access and variety of opportunities for creative encounters. What primarily started as a reaction to the academic status quo, the institutionalized art world, turned into an arena that also enjoyed commercial success through the efforts of privately funded museums and galleries, even leading to the establishment of the first contemporary art fair in Istanbul in 2002, aiming to attract both domestic and international buyers. The founding of offices by main players of the international auction market sped this transformation, motivated by a conviction that Turkish Contemporary Art fell behind in establishing its rightful place within the art market. This effort came into full bloom in 2009, with the first Turkish art sale at Sotheby's, made possible through the commitment of the specialist in charge of the sale; Ali Can Ertug, to grant Turkish art the respect and attention it deserved within the international art market. His unfaltering confidence in Turkish artists, whether contemporary or not, resulted in an impact that far exceeded the terrain of lot numbers. Backed by its ever increasing visibility through media outlets, auction records not only benefit the individual artist whose works are sold, but they have a far greater impact in validating art from the region as a whole by arousing curiosity among a new generation of well informed collectors outside Turkey. As we know, it takes a complex system of establishments such as galleries, museums, non-profit institutions and philanthropically charged endeavors of the private sector to nourish cultural awareness, but it is only when artwork is also a commodity outside that terrain, that it becomes possible for the artist to establish a livelihood based solely on their artistic merits.

The Long and Winding Road of Turkish Art

By Emin Mahir Balcioglu
Director, Contemporary Istanbul
Turkey, May 2010

Contemporary art from Turkey is in the limelight (at last); its debut has been delayed for several reasons, but today, supported by a vibrant emerging economy and an ever increasing group of collectors, it has begun to thrive. This is all very new and remarkable; the fact that Turkish artists are beginning to showcase their works not only in their own country but abroad, and as the days go by are more and more acknowledged, proves that there are considerable transformations at hand.

As any art of an emerging country needs to go through certain obligatory paths, Turkish art has followed the same trajectory in addition to the specificity of its own experience, which is rooted in its history of radical reforms that its society underwent since the middle of the 19th century. Leaders of the Ottoman Empire, well aware of the backwardness of the society and striving to protect the empire against irreversible collapse, espoused the way of reforming the state and society at large. To this end they encouraged radical changes in all the realms of human endeavor. In the domain of the arts they established a new school of fine arts conceived on the French model. Students and artists were also sent abroad, primarily to Paris to learn these new art forms. A shift from traditional artistic expressions such as calligraphy and miniatures was the order of the day.

These reforming movements acquired greater momentum after the Republic was established in 1923. The shifts were of a more radical tone and again Paris was seen as the reference point. More and more schools of art were founded and new generations of artists began to develop their own styles. What emerged in the first decades of the Republic was an art in its modern expressions very much under the influence of external movements but at the same time which followed a course of stylistic development that was not in tune with the mainstream art centers of the world at the time. This phenomenon was difficult to fathom for the critics and historians of art, but eventually all fell in place in the last few years during which we have witnessed considerable transformations in the global art scene. The emergence of new vibrant centers has radically changed the paradigms which reigned on the art world for so many years. It was only a decade ago that the prevalent discourse with regard to new artistic expressions was dominated by the dichotomy of the center vis à vis the periphery, the "other." The pursuit of alternative paradigms, of new synthesis of the mainstream with the "local," was viewed with pre-conceived and stereotyped searches for blatant vernacular or simplified national traits.

This all changed due to a series of phenomena. First is the emergence of the societies in question as economically viable powers with their own developing art markets and the need to crown these material achievements with aesthetic gratification. Another aspect that has been a driving force in these societies was the strengthening of pluralism (even if not in all the cases). Democratization, the development of communication, the internet, greater travel, all positive effects of the acquired wealth, have contributed to this process. Today a Chinese or Turkish artist feels somewhat liberated from constraints and has greater self confidence in introducing his or her own cultural traits and discourses into the creative process which, at the same time, utilizes media accessible to all, no matter what the cultural extraction.

Today Turkish contemporary art is coming to the fore. Undervalued and unknown until recently on the international market, this "new" art is grounded on a solid local market. With the ever-increasing number of collectors in the big cities, primarily in Istanbul, acquiring more and more contemporary works, the market is having its first boom. It is sufficient to follow the volume of sales at the recent auctions where it is possible to note up to 55% increases in the value of the total sales in just one year (from March 2009 to March 2010). Likewise are the greater levels of participation in the premier art fair, Contemporary Istanbul, in 2009, and even more this year. (More than half of the applications are being turned down due to lack of space as well as more stringent selection processes.) As in all such booming environments, the risks of having bubbles that could quickly burst, are a reality, which, in the Turkish context, may appear a bit more worrisome since one of the problems is that criticism of art has not evolved as quickly as art itself creating a certain vacuum in this field. This is a serious problem for the art lovers and collectors who need some kind of guidance and protection against speculative trends.

But going back to the positive developments, we are now witnessing sales of works in the seven figure realm, a phenomenon rarely seen before, only in a few memorable auctions of 19th-century rarities. A case in point is the last auction in London at Sotheby's dedicated to Turkish contemporary art. A total of £2.5m in sales was achieved during said auction. Small as it may appear in scale, these are significant figures for an emerging art scene, especially if one looks at the increase in one year from the previous auction in 2009 (over 60%).

What all this comes down to is that Turkish contemporary art is exciting and booming. It is vibrant and novel, and from a financial point of view, still a bargain. Setting aside aesthetic considerations it is a good investment from all points of view: from a cultural perspective, the collector is acquiring a work that enriches the diversity of the portfolio; from an economic perspective, it is money well spent, as this art is still sold well below its world value.

After having gone through a very long and winding road, art from Turkey is slowly gaining the attention that it has long deserved. To be part of this process, to be a collector of Turkish art is certainly very enticing. All this gives us joy but as of a few weeks ago we feel orphaned, crippled, having lost someone who was so instrumental in promoting this art not only with his deep knowledge but also with his genuine enthusiasm. The show must go on, as the saying goes, but it will be very hard for all of us to overcome such grief. We will always miss you, Ali Can.

istanbulcool!

What's happening in Contemporary Turkish Art now

Serkan Adin

b. 1977 in Izmir, Turkey
Currently lives and works on the east coast of the Aegean Sea



Untitled 2008
Acrylic on canvas
49.2 x 76.8 in / 125 x 195 cm
© Serkan Adin, Courtesy of x-ist

Haluk Akakçe

b. 1970 in Ankara, Turkey
Currently lives and works in SoHo, New York



Sundays at Space 2008
Acrylic paint on archival acid-free museum board
61 x 41 in / 154.9 x 104.1 cm
© Haluk Akakçe, Courtesy of Deitch Projects

Party (for Love) 2008
Acrylic paint on archival acid-free museum board
61 x 41 in / 154.9 x 104.1 cm
© Haluk Akakçe, Courtesy of Deitch Projects

Vahap Avsar

b. 1965 in Malatya, Turkey
Currently lives and works in New York, NY



Take Your Pills 2008
Pills
Life size
© Vahap Avsar

Sleep 2008
Glass
Life size
© Vahap Avsar



Kezban Arca Batıbeki

b. 1956 in Istanbul, Turkey

Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Cats and Owners 2 2007

Digital photography, mounted on Forex

33.9 x 59.4 in / 86 x 151 cm

© Kezban Arca Batıbeki

Ramazan Bayrakođlu

b. 1966 in Balikesir, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Izmir, Turkey



Pool, 2007
Stitched fabric mounted on canvas
78 x 102.7 in / 198 x 261 cm
© Ramazan Bayrakođlu, Courtesy of Dirimart

Gökçe Çelikel

b. 1976 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Paris, France



Cover Girls I 2009

Oil on canvas

63.8 x 51.2 in / 162 x 130 cm

© Gökçe Çelikel

Femmes Allongees I 2009

Oil on canvas

39.4 x 31.9 in / 100 x 81 cm

© Gökçe Çelikel

Taner Ceylan

b. 1967 in Germany
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey

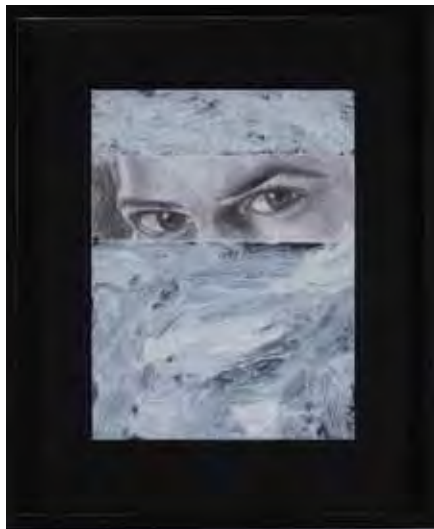


Ephemere XVI 1994

Mixed media on paper

12.6 x 9.5 in / 24 x 32 cm

© Taner Ceylan, Courtesy of I-20 Gallery, New York and Galerist, Istanbul



Ephemere IV 1994

Mixed media on paper

12.6 x 9.5 in / 24 x 32 cm

© Taner Ceylan, Courtesy of I-20 Gallery, New York and Galerist, Istanbul



Ephemere IX 1994

Mixed media on paper

12.6 x 9.5 in / 24 x 32 cm

© Taner Ceylan, Courtesy of I-20 Gallery, New York and Galerist, Istanbul



Ephemere XIX 1994

Mixed media on paper

12.6 x 9.5 in / 24 x 32 cm

© Taner Ceylan, Courtesy of I-20 Gallery, New York and Galerist, Istanbul

Ahmet Elhan

b. 1959 in Izmir, Turkey

Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



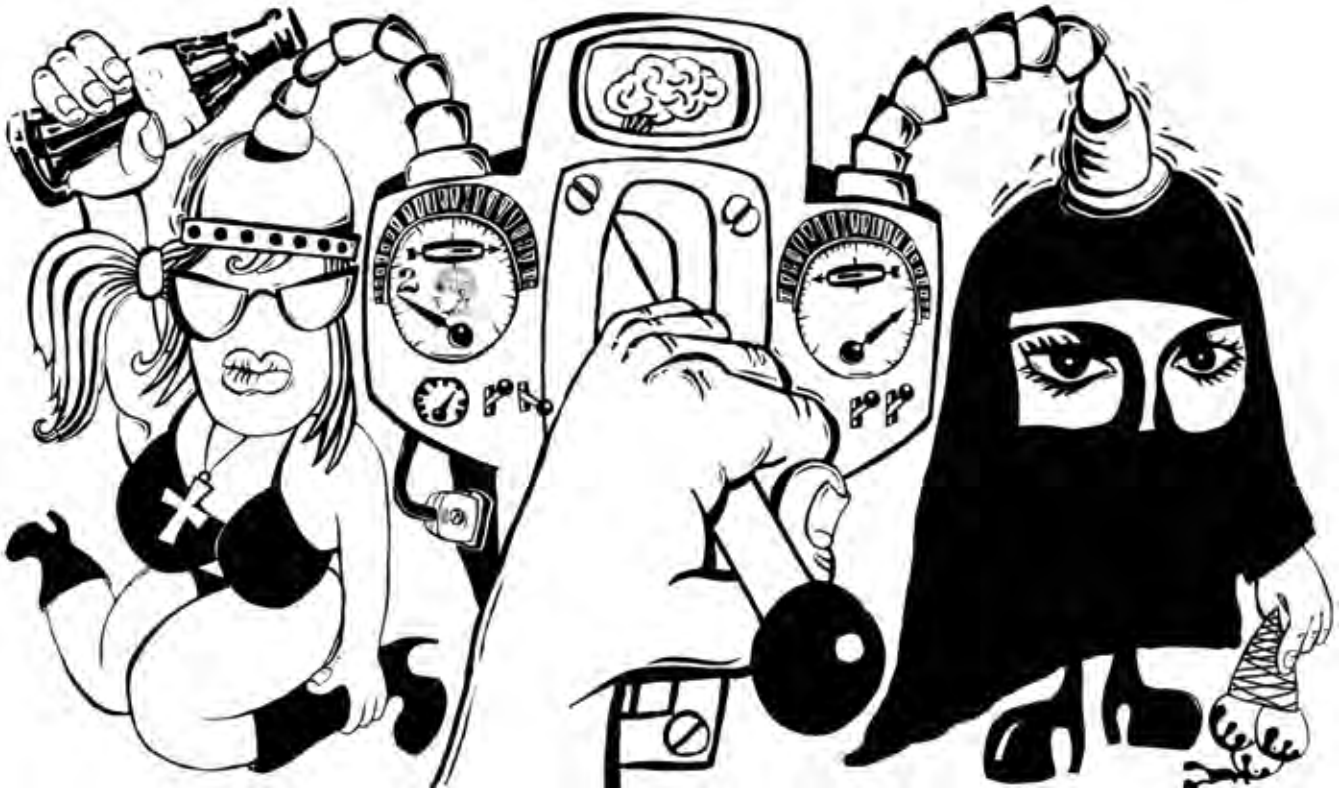
Istanbul Erkek Lisesi 2009

C-print, unique edition 78.7 x 43.3 in

© Ahmet Elhan, Courtesy, C.A.M. Galeri

Extramücadele

Began project in 1997



Welcome to the Machine 2004
Silkprint, ed. 2/5
27.6 x 39.4 in / 70 x 100 cm
© Extramücadele, Courtesy Galeri NON

Hands Up 2008
Archival pigment print mounted on aluminum, ed. 2/3
27.6 x 66.9 in / 70 x 170 cm
© Extramücadele, Courtesy Galeri NON



Mustafa Horasan

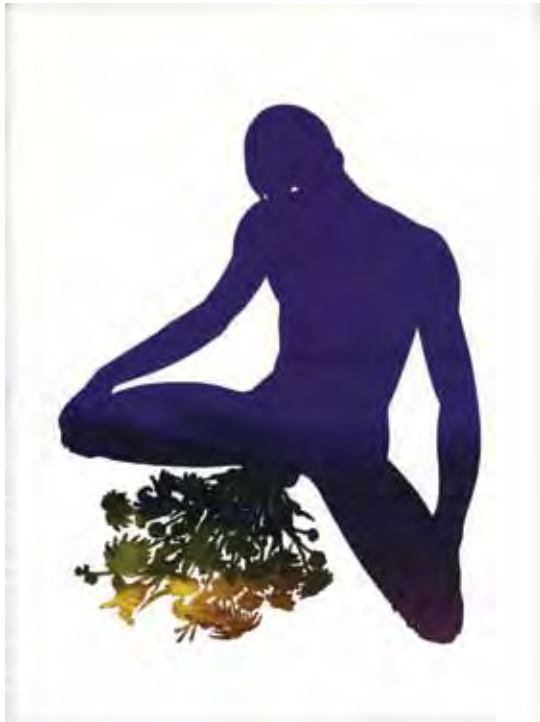
b. 1965 in Aydin, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Untitled 2009
Oil on canvas
15.75 x 19.7 in / 40 x 50 cm (each)
© Mustafa Horasan, Courtesy of Pi Artworks

Peter Hristoff

b. 1958 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in New York, New York



In the Garden (diptych) 2009
Silkscreen on paper, AP
15 x 11.25 in / 38 x 28.6 cm (each)
© Peter Hristoff

Untitled (rug) 2005
Wool, unique, handwoven in Usak, Turkey
92.25 x 52.3 in / 234.3 x 132.8 cm
© Peter Hristoff



Gözde ilkin

b. 1981 in Kutahya, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Boys Eating Turkish Delight 2009
Acrylic and stitching on fabric
13.4 x 9.8 in / 34 x 25 cm
© Gözde ilkin, Courtesy of Art Sumer

Burhan Kum

b. 1962 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Antalya, Turkey



Historical Engineering- Kidnapped Odalisque (diptych) 2007
Mixed media on canvas
55 x 90.6 in / 140 x 230 cm
© Burhan Kum / Courtesy of x-ist

Bahar Oganer

b. 1980 in Turkey
Currently lives and works in Turkey



Far Away 2010
Acrylic on canvas
78.7 x 78.7 in / 200 x 200 cm
© Bahar Oganer, Courtesy Dirimart

Soner Ön

b. 1980 in Brooklyn, New York
Currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York



Untitled (from Aquarius series) 2007
Enamel on aluminum
20 x 24 in
© Soner Ön

Untitled (from Aquarius series) 2007
Enamel on aluminum
20 x 24 in
© Soner Ön



İrfan Önürmen

b. 1950 in Bursa, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Turkey



Tulle II 2010

Tulle

11.8 x 9.4 in / 30 x 24 cm

© İrfan Önürmen, Courtesy of Pi Artworks

Tulle IV 2010

Tulle

11.8 x 9.4 in / 30 x 24 cm

© İrfan Önürmen, Courtesy of Pi Artworks

Arif Özakça

b. 1979 in London, England
Currently lives and works in London, England

Untitled 2007

Oil on linen

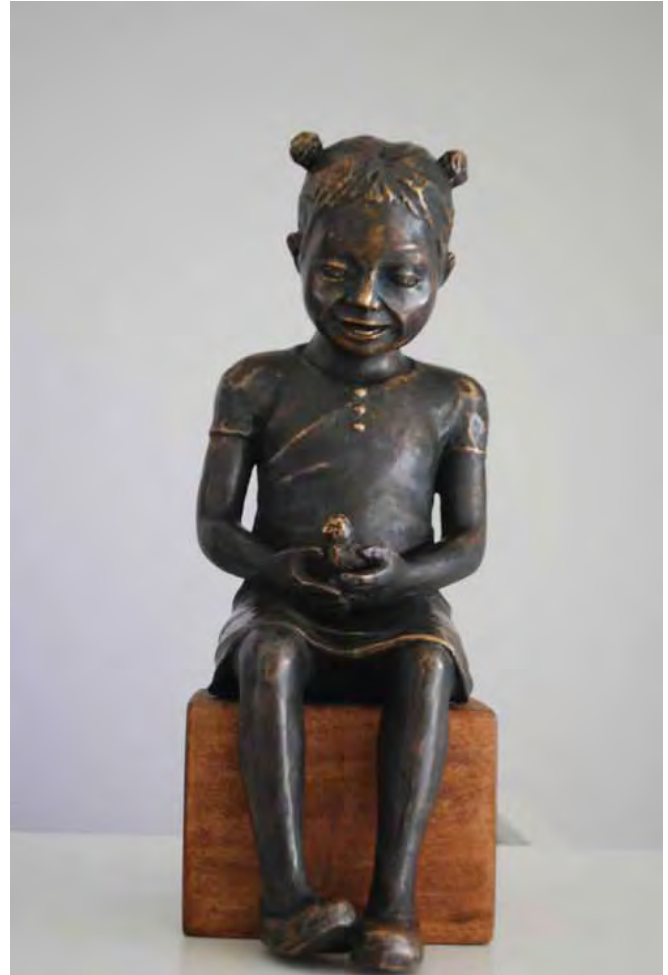
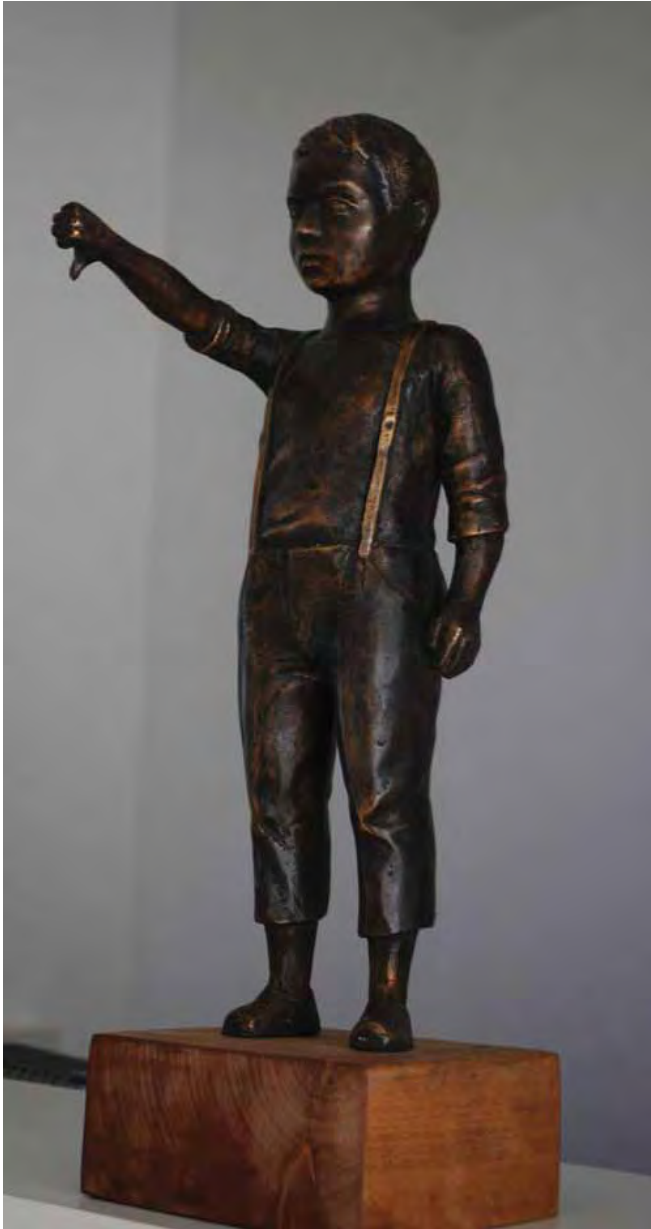
74.8 x 59 in / 190 x 150 cm

© Arif Özakça



Yaşam Şaşmazer

b. 1980 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Turkey

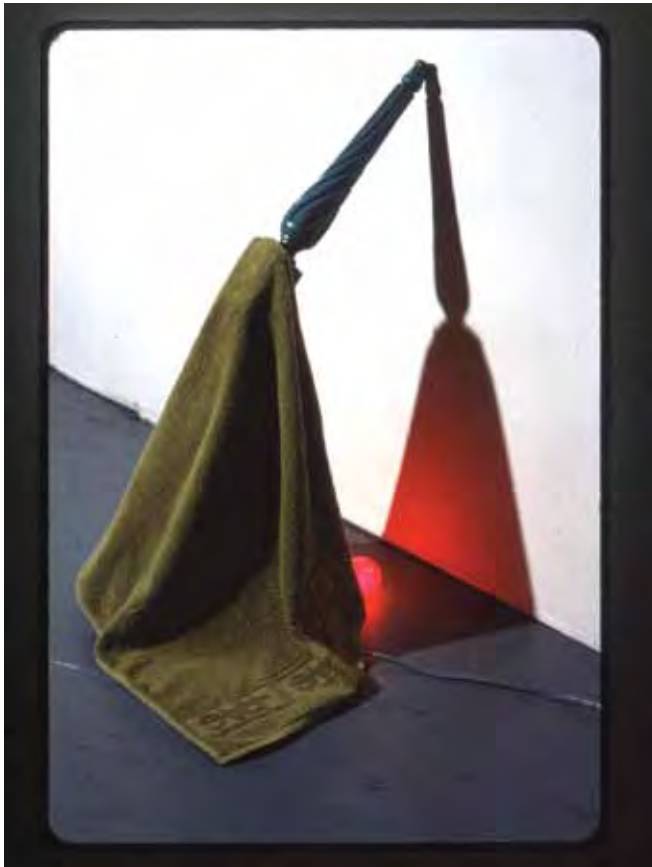


Strange Fruit 2009
Bronze, ed. 7/7
11.8 x 4.3 x 4.3 in / 30 x 11 x 11 cm
© Yaşam Şaşmazer
Courtesy of Çağla Cabaoglu Art Gallery

Game Over 2009
Bronze, ed. 7/7
19 x 5.5 x 7.1 in / 48 x 14 x 18 cm
© Yaşam Şaşmazer
Courtesy of Çağla Cabaoglu Art Gallery

Sefa Saglam

b. 1970 in Akhisar, Turkey
Currently lives and works in New York, New York



Rag 1997
RAG towel, light bulbs, wood and paint
© Sefa Saglam



Mutter 1999
Fashion magazines
© Sefa Saglam



Cradle 1999
Watercolor and bleach
© Sefa Saglam

Canan Şenol

b. 1970 in Istanbul, Turkey

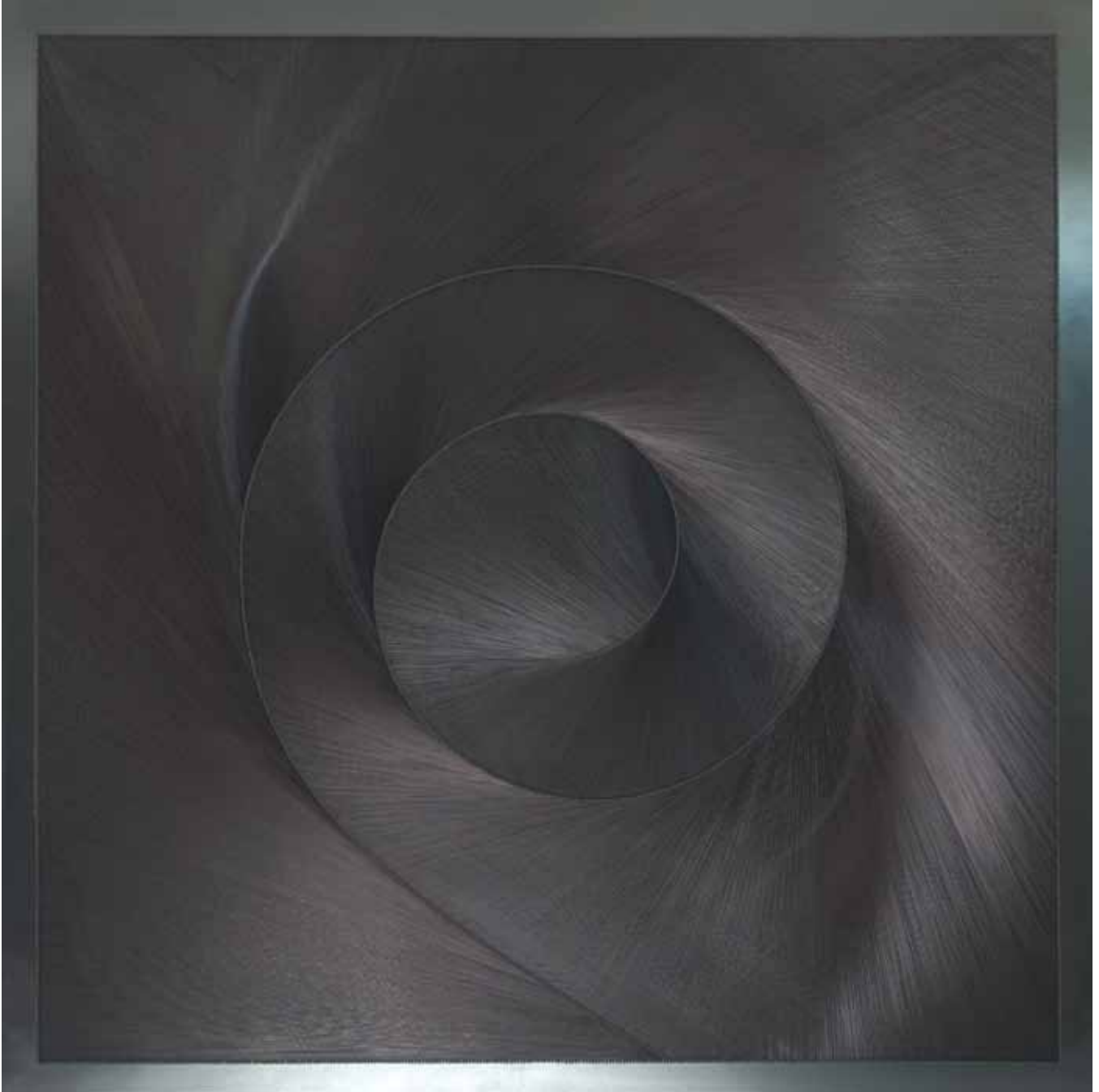
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Fables for Adults 2003
Photograph, ed. 1/5
41.3 x 55 in / 105 x 140 cm
© Canan Şenol, Courtesy of x-ist

Gülay Sermercioğlu

b. 1968 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



The Black Hole 2010
Wires, screws and wood
63 x 63 in / 160 x 160 cm
© Gülay Sermercioğlu, Courtesy of Pi Artworks

Erinç Seymen

b. 1980 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Turkey



Untitled 2009
Silkscreen print on light box
47.2 in / 120 cm diameter
© Erinç Seymen, Courtesy of Galerist

Hale Tenger

b. 1960 in Izmir, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Turkish Delight 2003
Majolica terra cotta, ed 5/8
3.1 x 5.7 x 7.5 in / 8 x 14.5 x 19 in
© Hale Tenger, Courtesy of Galeri Nev

Nazif Topçuoğlu

b. 1954 in Ankara, Turkey

Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Lamentations 2007

Lambda print

45.3 x 68.1 in / 115 x 173 cm

© Nazif Topçuoğlu, Courtesy of Galeri Nev

Magic Carpets 2010

Lambda print

47.2 x 70.9 in / 120 x 180 cm

© Nazif Topçuoğlu, Courtesy of Galeri Nev

Elif Uras

b. . 1972 in Ankara, Turkey
Currently lives and works in New York, New York and Istanbul, Turkey



Cover Up 2009
Iznikware, polychrome underglaze on fritware
12 in diameter, 20 in height, 30.5 x 50.8 cm
© Elif Uras

Ebru Uygun

b. 1974 in Istanbul, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Istanbul, Turkey



Untitled 2009
Mixed media on canvas
78.7 x 78.7 in / 200 x 200 cm
© Ebru Uygun, Courtesy Dirimart

Halil Vurucuođlu

b. 1984 in Izmir, Turkey
Currently lives and works in Izmir, Turkey



Snow 2008
Cut paper
37.8 x 35.6 in / 96 x 90.5 cm
© Halil Vurucuođlu, Courtesy Dirimart

Ekrem Yalçındağ

b. 1964 in Gaziantep, Turkey

Currently lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany and Istanbul, Turkey



Records in Colour 2005-2007

Oil on canvas

68.9 x 68.9 in / 175 x 175 cm

© Ekrem Yalçındağ, Courtesy of Dirimart



unleashed

Contemporary Art from Turkey

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Above and Beyond the Bosphorus

By Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller
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istanbul Cool! has truly been a journey. It all started with an exploratory trip to Turkey in the summer of 2009, and a few points in the right direction from my close friend, Maryam Homayoun Eisler. She had become very aware of Turkey's burgeoning art scene and was working on the book **Unleashed: Contemporary Art from Turkey** with Hossein Amirsadeghi. She made a list for me of all of the "must-sees" on the Turkish art scene. With no expectations of what I would find or who I would meet, I found myself immediately enthralled by the variety, quality, and excitement of contemporary Turkish art. With few art professionals fully aware of the truly thriving Istanbul art world, I could hardly have prepared myself for the impact that it would have on me. Per Maryam's suggestions, I visited remarkable galleries, including Galerist, Dirimart, Art Sumer, x-ist, Galeri Nev, Pi Art and many others. As a New York City gallery owner for the past twenty-five years, I must say that these visits made an indelible impression on me; I knew that I would continue to expose myself, personally and professionally, to contemporary Turkish art in every way possible.

I must also thank my friend Henry Howard-Sneyd, who convinced me not to leave for Turkey without contacting his colleague and friend, Ali Can Ertug, Senior Vice President of Strategic Business Development at Sotheby's, and who had been working to build a market for Turkish contemporary art, as well as being instrumental in helping Sotheby's establish its Istanbul office in 2008. Ali Can was eager to make suggestions and passed on to me his legendary list of fun things to do in Istanbul (I must admit that Ali Can's list has since become my mantra and has made many more travelers happy while visiting Istanbul).

My friends, Lila and Behdad Alizadeh, reconnected me with an old friend Leyla Alaton, who graciously took me under her wings the minute I landed in Turkey and basically accompanied me to every gallery and artist studio, and made sure to expose me to anything else happening in Istanbul. Through Leyla, before I knew it, Turkey revealed its most captivating sides, and I was under its spell. Leyla played a vital role in making me fall in love with Turkey, its art and its people.

I returned from my trip knowing that sometime in the near future I would host an exhibition to include some of the phenomenal artists whose works I had the pleasure of coming into contact with. Upon my return to New York, I finally met Ali Can in person, the most handsome and charming young man in town, who had already become a close friend through our many e-mail and phone conversations. We immediately became inseparable friends, and our shared interest in Turkey's rich heritage and dynamic contemporary art scene, forged another strong bond. We knew we would work together in promoting contemporary Turkish art in New York and on an international scale.

I traveled with Ali Can to Istanbul in December to participate in the Contemporary Istanbul art fair. It was during the fair when I came into close contact with Emin Mahir Balcioglu, chairman of the art fair, who was tremendously helpful in guiding me in a market that was new territory to me. Through Leyla and Ali Can, I also had the honor of meeting the most important collectors and patrons of contemporary Turkish art, including Omer Koc, Cigden Simavi, Aliye Simavi, Emin Hitay, Nezhir Barut, as well as Sevdä and Can Elgiz, and became aware of how instrumental Turkish collectors have been in shaping this fascinating and burgeoning market.

As soon as the fair ended, we fast and furiously began working towards a group exhibition of contemporary Turkish art that I decided I would host at my gallery in the summer of 2010. My dear friends Ali Can, Maryam Eisler, and Leyla Alaton guided me through every step, working effortlessly with me to achieve this ambitious show. Ali Can's advice and guidance was truly invaluable. He was also the link in establishing my relationships with Sefa Saglam, Aliye Simavi, and Asli Karahan, who have been instrumental in helping me realize this exhibition. Sefa through her brilliant academic perspective, and Aliye and Asli by offering their assistance in getting the word out to everyone and anyone.

The result of this collaboration is my show, **istanbul Cool!**, an ambitious group show featuring 28 contemporary Turkish artists working in all different media. To Maryam Eisler and Hossein Amirsadeghi, I must say thank you, as I owe the title of the exhibition to both of you.

To say that I am proud of the exhibition is a vast understatement. It is a project that has put me in touch with some of my closest and most valued friends, both personally and professionally. The exhibition has truly been a journey, a journey that has changed my life in many ways. What I am most thankful for, is that along this journey, I had the pleasure of meeting and sharing a friendship with Ali Can Ertug, whose hard work and legacy we seek to carry on through this exhibition in our continual promotion of contemporary Turkish art. This exhibition is dedicated to you, dear Ali Can.

Special Thanks



This exhibition and catalogue are dedicated in loving memory of Ali Can Ertug. We hope to carry on his legacy through this show and by promoting contemporary Turkish art across the globe. He will always remain in our hearts, and his spirit will forever live on.

We would like to thank and acknowledge the following people who helped to make this exhibition possible:

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Last but not least, all of the artists, without whom this would never have been as groundbreaking an exhibition as it is.

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