

TODAY'S ZAMAN

ALEXANDRA IVANOFF

2 Turkish artists featured in BERLINARTPROJECTS

In the first weekend of May, Berlin's art galleries opened their doors with a spectacular »»

In the first weekend of May, Berlin's art galleries opened their doors with a spectacular array of contemporary art on the first "Gallery Weekend" of Spring.

Though the weekend was a citywide event, the centrally located avenue Potsdamer Strasse had over 55 galleries that hosted works of international artists.

The BERLINARTPROJECTS (BAP) on Potsdamer Strasse is the only gallery in Berlin owned and operated by a Turk, and the only one with a satellite gallery in İstanbul. BAP in both cities is owned by Tarık Yoleri, who commands a stable of predominantly Turkish and German artists.

BAP's offering on Gallery Weekend was a mixed media group show titled "Recharged Reality" with works by Yaşam Şaşmazer, Daniel Harms, Eda Soylu, Ulrich Riedel, Claudia Vitari and Meike Zopf, coupled with a book launch of Şaşmazer's "Metanoia," an annotated photographic document of her work.

The event was also directly connected to the ongoing series of 10th anniversary celebrations of İstanbul's premier art fair, Contemporary İstanbul. This was the second showing of "Metanoia" (selections from the first edition) for Şaşmazer, who lives and works in both İstanbul and Berlin.

The first edition was shown at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University's Tophane-i Amire gallery in 2014.

Şaşmazer's shadows

The public interview and book launch at BAP was hosted by Marcus Graf, an art historian who is also an associate professor of contemporary art at Yeditepe University and program director for Contemporary İstanbul. He and Şaşmazer discussed the concept and presentation of "Metanoia," which represents the third part of a sequence of wooden sculpted figures she has created over the last few years.

"I've been following the work of Yaşam Şaşmazer for 10 years," began Graf. "I think they balance esthetic and political values as well as being beautiful and impressively esthetic. They follow aspects of her personal life with psychological [facets] and layers of subversive violence."

"The word 'metanoia' is a term used in psychoanalysis to describe a specific personality breakdown that occurs in psychotherapy," Graf continued. To which Şaşmazer added: "Psychology affects my work. 'Metanoia' was a powerful term to show what happens next -- a transition of the self." Graf explained that the previous two parts in the series were large figures of children, followed by their teenage versions who were exposed to years of violence. This third section (Metanoia) is where "the figures are at one with their shadow."

"I'm interested in the deeper, hidden layers of humanity," Şaşmazer says. "Everybody has dark rooms inside. Some shadows are bigger than the figures. The notion of violence shows how we fight with ourselves -- how we deal with our unconscious self. Some of the figures confront them, to try to deal with them. The sources are from my life, but I add other stories too. And I love wood; It's the right material [for me]. I paint the dresses but not the skin, leaving marks on the wood to allude to the processes."

The skin on one of the two figures lying down next to each other in Şaşmazer's latest piece, titled

"Either you or I, but both together is out of the question!" shows an almost graffiti-style text printed on all available areas of flesh visible to the viewer, while her un-graffitied "shadow" (another identical person) lies directly at her back. "I think I'm going deeper," she explained. "I'm interested in the shadows of society that we've created."

In that regard, her "Sciamachia," a figure of a kneeling girl in a black dress holding a long, heavy rope attached to a giant black shadow in front of her, is perhaps the apex of the Metanoia conceit: The rope is functioning almost like a noose around the shadow's neck. The girl is struggling and tugging mightily, frozen in mid-scream.

Fossilized flowers

The other Turkish artist in the group show who lives and works in İstanbul and Berlin is Eda Soylu. Her two botanically related pieces -- "Dying flowers in concrete" and four framed photographs of wilted flowers in open gas capsules -- decorate the walls of BAP.

"Dying Flowers" is an imposing installation that completely covers one medium-sized wall in cement, which is studded with actual flowers. Speaking with Today's Zaman, Soylu explained that "their fragility works hand-in-hand with the physical hardness: The flowers dissipate the power of the concrete. The Ottomans, even though they would slaughter each other, delighted in building delicate bird houses."

Her four black-and-white photos show opened gas canisters (from police rifles) that serve as mini-vases for wilting flowers. The grainy quality of the prints evokes the uncomfortable pallor of toxicity to the plants, which are barely clinging to life. She collected the gas canisters shot by police in Taksim during the Gezi protests. "After two years, I opened them, and I started crying and coughing," Soylu says.

"My professor told me that oppression and repression are never in black and white -- always in color." She purposely, perhaps obtusely, chose black and white to express what she witnessed during June 2013 in Taksim Square. "After Gezi, my comprehension of my own works changed; the darkest thing I had ever seen was the colors of oppression and repression in real life."

The BERLINARTPROJECTS (Potsdamer Strasse 61, Berlin) group exhibit runs through May 23.



"Surveillance Fail" (2015) by artist Eda Soylu from her series "I Feared."

2015-05-11
Arts & Culture
Columnist:: ALEXANDRA IVANOFF