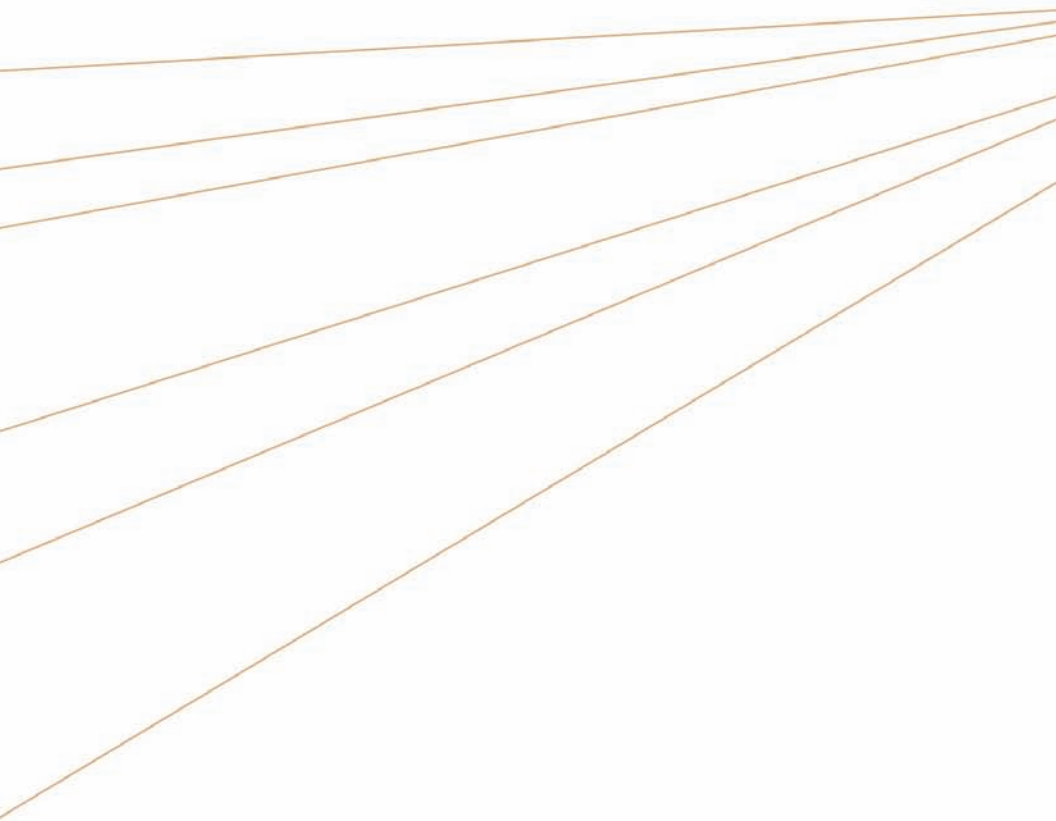




sublime
porte

art and
contemporary
turkey





sublime
porte

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contemporary
turkey



sublime porte

art and
contemporary
turkey

MARCH 14 – MAY 2, 2013

Curated by Parvez Mohsin and Yulia Tikhonova

LOCATION

Dr. M.T. Geoffrey Yeh Art Gallery
Sun Yat Sen Hall
St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, NY 11439

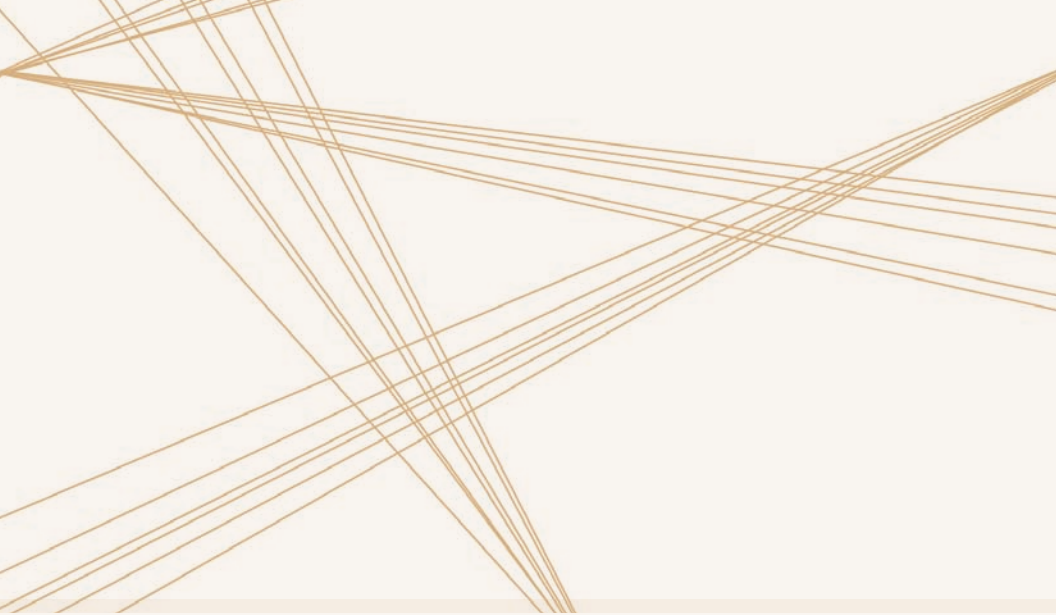
GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday–Friday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Saturday, 12 - 5 p.m.
Sunday–Monday, Closed
www.stjohns.edu/yehgallery

Exhibition Prints: Kenneth Pizzo
Photo Editing: Deanna Rizzi
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CONTENTS

01 Director's Note
Parvez Mohsin

02 "Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey"
Yulia Tikhonova

04 "A Gathering of Memory and Light"
Paul Fabozzi

08 Artists

Osman Akan
Burak Arikan
Kezban Batibeki
Nezaket Ekici
Paul Fabozzi
Murat Germen
Peter Hristoff
Gözde Ilkin

Michael Marfione
Alex Morel
Arzu Ozkal
Gulay Semercioglu
Orkan Telhan
Elif Uras
Halil Vurucuoglu



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I experienced Turkey through Istanbul's vibrant cosmopolis and its layering of civilizations. Never before had I seen a city so rooted in its glorious past, while balanced against the modernizing forces that are shaping its future. In Istanbul, I witnessed the country's recent economic expansion and the assertion of its political and economic scope of influence on world affairs.

Istanbul's history, cultural diversity and Ottoman architecture allowed me to situate myself in a unique place in the world – the crossroads of Eastern and Western cultures. I related to the city collectively and individually. Its overpowering presence offers a window into contemporary human relationships. Istanbul's historical narrative is poignantly conveyed through its monuments specifically, Hagia Sophia's aesthetic dualism and the symbolism of the Sublime Porte.

My first impression of Hagia Sophia is that it communicates a sense of immediacy, connectivity and a distinctive formality that affect the individual's temporal relationship to space. The experience was hard to absorb in the midst of hundreds of visitors – who gazed at the dome, spoke different languages and used multiple technological gadgets to photograph its magnificence. The aesthetic hybridity of the site is visible in the towering minarets flagging its grounds in contrast to its intricate buttresses and massive dome. Previously used as a basilica and then as a mosque, the present day museum of Hagia Sophia is a result of a secular democracy that marks a period of tolerance and fragile coexistence in the region. Conversely, the Sublime Porte was the gateway through which diplomatic emissaries reached the central government of the Ottoman Empire. The Porte can be interpreted as an abstract and open-ended structure that communicates the socio-political and cultural aspirations of the Ottoman government's desire to establish diplomacy and trade with the West. The Hagia Sophia and the Sublime Porte enable us to connect with Turkey's historical past as well as the culture of the modern day.

The exhibition *Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey* examines the cultural complexities of an increasingly integrated world. The work of these artists and curators gives us an opportunity to understand commonalities and functions of art across different cultures. Fifteen artists based in several cities, their work inspired by Turkey, focuses on identity, perception and multiculturalism. In exploring these themes, the exhibition harnesses the relationship the artists have with Turkey and acknowledges the local and global implications of a transnational experience in a rapidly changing environment. For me, Istanbul was an entry by which I was able to not only understand Turkey but the globalized world surrounding it. *Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey* is a gateway into the intersections of globalization and contemporary art.

In this catalogue, three essays are each presented as a conversation between the curators and the artist Paul Fabozzi, who uses space and environments in the process of art making by examining notions of materiality, self-reflection and the intangible.

Parvez Mohsin
Curator

Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey

“SUBLIME PORTE: ART AND CONTEMPORARY TURKEY”

Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey brings together work by fifteen artists for whom Turkey, and Turkish culture, is a primary focus of their art-making. Turkey has been a center of media attention for the past several years, and its booming economy has propelled its contemporary art scene. Turkish modernization has taken place at a very fast pace, exposing the impact of industrialization, democratization, and secularization. The artists in this exhibit respond to these issues from a critical perspective – those who live far from the homeland do not trust its covert politics; those who live in the country view them with cynicism.

The majority of artists in this exhibition belong to the Turkish American diaspora. They received their MFA's from the best art programs in the U.S. These programs introduced them to Western art history and inspired their investigation into the ethics of Turkish society and its governing elite. The multimedia education they received in the U.S., as opposed to their more academic training in Turkey, has equipped these artists to embrace technology, software and interactivity in their art practices.

Burak Arikan, and Orkan Telhan are alumni of MIT, and Osman Akan is a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts. They utilize their technical skills to construct objects using industrial materials that reflect the recent Turkish construction boom (Akan), or to create software for children's education (Telhan). They target issues of urban planning, mass media, and neoliberalism (Arikan), – problems that have long concerned intellectuals in the West.

Elif Uras studied at Columbia University and Peter Hristoff at the School of Visual Arts. But they draw heavily on the Turkish applied arts tradition, even to the extent of having their work produced in Turkey. Uras makes her astounding vessels in Iznik, where some of the most refined ceramics of the Ottoman Empire were produced. Uras fashions her vessels as female figurines, and uses patterns to decorate them as sexy belly dancers. Peter Hristoff weaves his prayer rugs with the Priene Hali workshop, in Gullubahce, Turkey. Hristoff calls them “Seccade” which is a term used to define a sacred space. His rugs not only define a sacred space for prayer, they also elevate a craft into a sublime art form.

The artists residing in Turkey focus on the subjects of identity, the role of women in society, and education. They use the traditional mediums of painting and embroidery to create a cosmos of absurdity and paradox reflecting on Turkish neoliberal society. Kezban Batibeki and Gözde Ilkin create work that is humorous, interactive and sharp in its critique of the clichés attached to Islam and Muslim women. In the work by Gulay Semercioglu, made out of wire thread, the viewer finds media technologies, but not the pop media language of today; this language is a fusion of tradition, modernity and craft. Murat Germen engages with the city of Istanbul. He uses it as an image and a symbol, pursuing an inquiry into the adventures, misdeeds, and dilemmas of its buildings, streets and citizens. His landscapes - rendered through Photoshop - build on the post-modern concern for the historical layering

that constitutes contemporary Istanbul as it absorbs the impact of globalization. This history is not only reflected in the urban and architectural remnants, but also in the photographic archives that Germen utilizes. The American artists in this exhibition - Alex Morel, Paul Fabozzi and Michael Marfione join ancient culture to revelations of modernity. They play the game of being mistaken for locals – their shifting identities are at the heart of their projects.

Sublime Porte is the West's familiar name for the Ottoman Empire (1300-1924), which, at one point, encompassed parts of the Middle East, Europe and Africa, and which produced a great culture in this region and beyond. This exhibition ranges from refined craft to industrial fabrication, from sophisticated Ottoman cultural legacy to Western critique, it offers a window into the latest movements in contemporary art. The contributions by non-Turkish artists add a provocative, yet insightful, "Orientalist" perspective. Works that interpret space, time and identity challenge the perception of the public, the art expert and the collector.

Burak Arikan's *Islam, Republic, Neoliberalism* comprises three maps of the Istanbul urban system. The artist maps all the locations of Istanbul's mosques, creates blueprints of the monuments to Turkish officials, and charts the city's shopping malls. Arikan connects each location by a network of lines, highlighting their connections and interdependency. As the title reflects, these large digital prints represent the major political powers that govern Turkey today: Islam (mosque), Republic (monuments) and Neoliberalism (shopping malls). Arikan creates large-scale linear diagrams that, at first glance, look like celestial maps. Rendered with the precision of an architect – in an objective graphic style – their physical links are visible. In the past, Arikan has been concerned with revealing the hidden dynamics of globalization, like the industrial economy or the world art market. His early works such as *Meta-Markets*, 2007 and *Artist Collector Network*, 2010, reveal how the art world depends on status, privilege and secrecy. *Islam, Republic, Neoliberalism* represents Arikan's urge to expose the connections that the ruling class wants to conceal. Similar to the American, Mark Lombardy, Arikan reveals the intricate web of connections that lurk beneath current headlines. Since his graduation from MIT in 2006, Arikan has been living between Istanbul and New York, teaching workshops about networks, and producing prints and performances that seek to render visible, and open to discussion, the power networks that rule our lives. *Islam, Republic, Neoliberalism* debuted last year at the Istanbul Design Biennial, 2012.

As curator, I have been especially excited to work on this exhibition. Like many of the Turkish artists in this exhibition, I also received my education in the U.S. and I am also continually re-evaluating my position as an intellectual and curator working between the West and the East (Russia). This multicultural position is both challenging and exciting. A shared language of post-modernism, and a belief that art will change the world, joins me to the artists in this exhibition.

Yulia Tikhonova
Guest Curator
Sublime Porte: Art and Contemporary Turkey

“A GATHERING OF MEMORY AND LIGHT”

“We go to certain places to find what corresponds to something we half-suspect has long been in us already; the outside helps configure, helps us see the inside better.”

—André Aciman, *Alibis*

I

I was first introduced to Hagia Sophia through its image. But unlike many of the other iconic works of art and architecture that I became acquainted with in this manner, I have a distinct memory of that first meeting. It was a darkened lecture hall and I was an undergraduate painting student. The professor clicked a button, a 35mm slide dropped into position, and a representation of Hagia Sophia (which he explained was Greek for “Church of the Divine Wisdom”) projected onto a gigantic screen. The straight-on symmetrical view facing the sanctuary apse attempted to present, in rational terms, this building’s renowned interior as defined by its massive arches and a tempting glimpse of its window-ringed central dome. In spite of my frustration of being presented with only a sliver of the dome, articulated by distinct shafts of mote-filled light streaming from the small, low-lying windows, I sat up in my chair and peered intently at the picture, willing myself into that mysterious and awe-inspiring space.

Of course, this image—while loaded with the intention that corresponds with a particular vantage point, not to mention the physical inclusions and omissions of cropping—was meant at face value simply to offer a study aid. Nevertheless, that projection lodged in my mind’s eye and became an optical talisman that I carried with me on subsequent journeys to the spot of high ground above the Golden Horn where that most wondrous configuration of stone still sits nearly 1,500 years since its creation.

II

I left my hotel near Taksim Square early in the morning. I wanted to give myself time to walk, yet still arrive at Hagia Sophia when it opened at 9:00 a.m. While traversing the Galata Bridge, I happened into a conversation with a young gentleman. He was wearing a casual blazer, jeans, and a pair of Ray-Bans. I could easily imagine him walking down the street of any one of a number of international cities. It turned out he was from Beirut, a film producer of some kind, visiting Istanbul on business but with a bit of time to see the sites. We had a friendly chat as we made our way toward the building. I thought it might be interesting to tour the site with my new acquaintance. The energy of this familiar stranger might set me on a less predictable trajectory, might make this experience all the more memorable. But once he stated his intention to secure a guide, we decided to part ways. And, anyway, I had a specific plan in mind.

III

So, what was the nature of this particular visit? Well, I could say it was to have an experience of the site that would provide a counterpoint to the books and articles I had been reading about the building and the history of Istanbul. I could also say it was to see how differently

I would view the building after close to a decade since my last visit. Both would have been worthwhile endeavors—the former an attempt to bridge the gap between information and experience, the latter a meditation on temporality and shifting states of mind. Or was it that I just wanted to be with the building—to feel its grand yet intricate space, a pilgrimage of sorts to one of the most revered buildings ever constructed—as an exercise in presentness? I am sure that aspects of all three of these concepts were swirling around inside me that morning. But, like many of the other tourists visiting this monument, I was also intent on documenting my experience with a camera.

It's curious to think about the ability of the camera's lens to provide a mathematical overlay in relation to Hagia Sophia's exquisite geometries dreamed up all those centuries ago. But these two mathematical systems—a lens with its two-dimensional planes and defined edges, and a work of architecture, which exists in three-dimensional space and, therefore, is experienced peripatetically—can generate awkward alignments. This itself exposes something particular about taking pictures. It's fundamentally about the decision of what exactly to fit within the predetermined frame, and so on some level the photographer is engaged in a self-reflective process.

IV

After purchasing my ticket, I was immediately confronted with a large, bright red Turkish flag that partially covered the door into the exonarthex, the smaller of the two long transitional spaces that lead into the body of the building. Its indomitable presence reminds contemporary visitors that this building is no longer a place of worship, but a museum—part of the reforms initiated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

By the time I entered the building my camera was guiding my movement through the space, asking me to move in one direction or another, beckoning me to attend to certain configurations of matter and light. At the same time I also had “things” to see—points of interest, artifacts, and so forth. In the narthex, I sought out the great bronze door in the center—the one used in 537 C.E. by Justinian when this building was first consecrated. I imagined the pageantry of this precisely choreographed ritual, with Justinian and his entourage of church and governmental officials moving through the space in such a way as to activate the building's potent, symbolic geometries.

I wanted to savor this moment, slow it down. I did not want to simply walk through the door, but to make this transition somehow meaningful to me, a kind of folding of the past into the present. I used the camera as my mechanism for extending the moment. Above the bronze door is a mosaic that depicts Christ sitting on a jewel-covered throne. His right hand gestures a blessing and his left holds an open book. The inscription reads in ancient Greek, “Peace be with you, I am the Light of the World.”

Upon entering the body of the building, impressions, memories, and information melded into an intense experiential tonic, forcing me to respond and retrieve in turn. A defused light had gathered inside and was washing over the deep, warm surfaces, illuminating the residue of centuries. Ocher, deep green, innumerable cool and warm grays, flecks of blue, red, and purple . . . I wondered if this is the color of time.

I focused on the linear elements—the impossibly long wires that extend from the ceiling to suspend the low-lying lamps, the expansive arches and semidomes whose flowing curves are decorated with delicately painted patterns. These visual cues both oriented me in the space and forced me to keep moving. I remember thinking that this is all we have—we do not see space, we see only the things that demarcate space.

I inched closer to the dome, moving past the massive wooden round plaques painted by the calligrapher Mustafa Izzet Efendi during the nineteenth century. The Arabic script on the eight round panels proclaims the names of those sacred to Islam—Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, the first four Caliphs, and two of the grandsons of Muhammad. Then my eye moved up to the four seraphim who occupy the pendentives and have been bearing witness in this building since its beginning. Finally, I lingered beneath the central dome, crowned by the intricate script encircling the apex, also by Izzet Efendi, with a passage from the Koran that reads: “In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate; God is the light of Heaven and Earth. His light is Himself, not that which shines through glass or gleams in the morning star or glows in the firebrand.”

V

Taking one picture begets the taking of others. With a space this dynamic and complex the mind is in a constant state of anticipation, trying in vain to grasp the wondrous void that is sculpted by walls, arches, semidomes, and the central dome. With my camera pointed upward and using the dome as a centering point, I looked for ways of fitting the swooping edges into the rectangular format of the viewfinder. At a spot just to the right of the sanctuary apse, with the dome still in view, I took many pictures while lost in the visual game of choosing just the right slice of the building to make an image that could sit precisely on the edge between oriented and disoriented spatial representation.

VI

I made my way up the rustic stairs that lead to the upper gallery, then wandered over to the balcony and looked at the people below. Their hushed movements were countered by the perfect stillness of the floral-patterned illuminations created by the hanging lamps. Some people were in groups listening to a guide, some were peering through the lens of a camera, others were milling about, shifting their heads from one position to the next, trying in vain to get a unified visual hold on the space. We shared no collective rituals, just the quite echo of our individual thoughts.

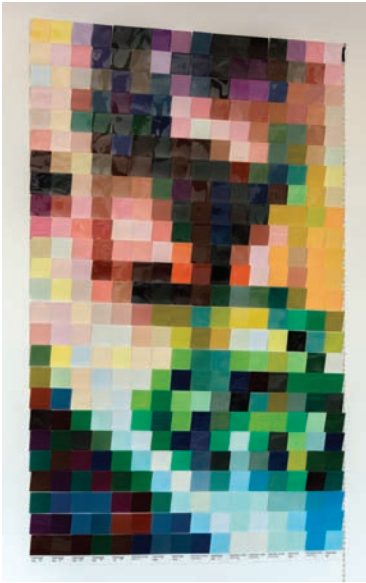
I was reminded of Sultan Mehmet II's rumination, from this very balcony, as written by the Tursun Bey, the Ottoman official who accompanied Mehmet when he first entered Hagia Sophia following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the decisive battle that gave the ruined and depopulated Byzantine capital to the Ottomans: "When he saw the dependent buildings of this mighty structure fallen into ruin, he thought of the impermanence and instability of the world, and of its ultimate destruction." It is curious that Mehmet, in the midst of what, for all intents and purposes, was a triumphal march to Hagia Sophia, dwelled on such melancholy ruminations. Even so, the name Hagia Sophia was translated—not changed—to Aya Sofya when, in short order following the siege, it was converted into a mosque, and embraced by another of the world's great religions.

VII

Heading out the door, I stopped to take a few final pictures. The strong early afternoon light was pouring through that large red Turkish flag. I marveled at the juxtaposition of the worn ancient stone and the blazing modern fabric.

I moved far enough away from the building to take it in as a whole. In many ways Hagia Sophia contains the history of Istanbul. A Byzantine church. A Muslim mosque. A modern museum. A point in space that defines an ever-shifting edge. Its history disrupts hard distinctions between East and West. It cannot be easily claimed or located. It has witnessed Christian and Muslim rituals and prayers, centuries of political and military tensions, and the subjective gazes of modern travelers. I wonder what other transformations are in store for this domed container that, in its very essence, holds fast to and celebrates memory and light.

Paul Fabozzi



DON'T SHOOT

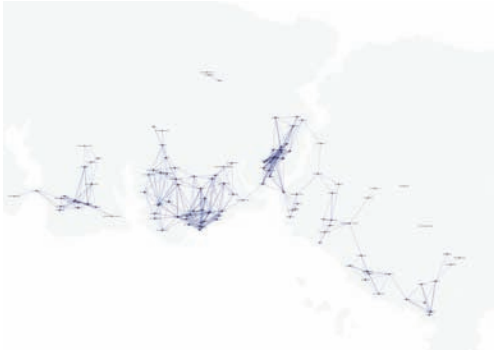
2013, Colored postcards,
UV stabilized reins, pins,
95 in x 101.25 in

Courtesy Leila Heller Gallery

OSMAN AKAN

Captured black and white movie still reconstructed using color postcards. In order to match the size of the postcards' image resolution was reduced. This process enlarged the size of each pixel until each square became a surface on its own; where the image was no longer legible. However, the audience will be able to see the image clear again when they look through the camera of their cellular phones.

Movie Credits
Title: Touch of Evil
Director: Orson Welles
Release date: 8 June 1958



ANITLAR

Wall print, 118.11 in x 86.67 in

BURAK ARIKAN

Mosques, the monuments and museums of the republic, and shopping malls... These constructions are physical spaces that surround us through the axis of contemporary Turkey and the city; that signal us where we are, where we were born, what to value and believe in, what to appreciate and who we are as agents; that constantly invite us to articulate with and experience them.

Even if we do not engage in every urban space in the city, we encounter invitations that we cannot dismiss. As the republican monuments that rise in every square and the museums of the republic that frequently come in our way remind us the concept of nation and keep a certain rhetoric alive, monumental shopping malls invite us to become relentless consumers. And we encounter the mosques, perhaps most frequently. With their highly familiar forms and by triggering our auidal and visual senses, they somewhat remind us how strong and deeply rooted they are. Beyond their functional and physical value and as symbols of the ideologies that they sustain, these constructions remind us their existence and power within our urban life in various ways and remain eternal and fresh in our daily lives.

Despite the fact that their reflections in urban architecture are relatively humble and low-paced, changing equations are echoing in the city as a consequence of the nature of ideologies. Even though physical spaces do not flex and bend easily, different meanings are being attributed to the same constructions, selective perceptions of the agents are changing, or certain constructions can simply be abandoned. Simultaneously, new symbolic spaces are being constructed and they rise as the definitions of new entities of meaning.

Given this context, *Islam*, *Republic*, *Neoliberalism* targets three fundamental ideologies that are most resilient and powerful in contemporary Turkey. The demonstration of physical relationships that these physical constructions establish with each other, via a network diagram, reveals a more powerful line of argument than simply designing a geographical map. Going beyond their quantity and the frequency of their salutations to the agents of the city, it renders the spatial power and network pattern of these ideologies susceptible to analysis.

(Translated by Zeynep Gokay Ustun)



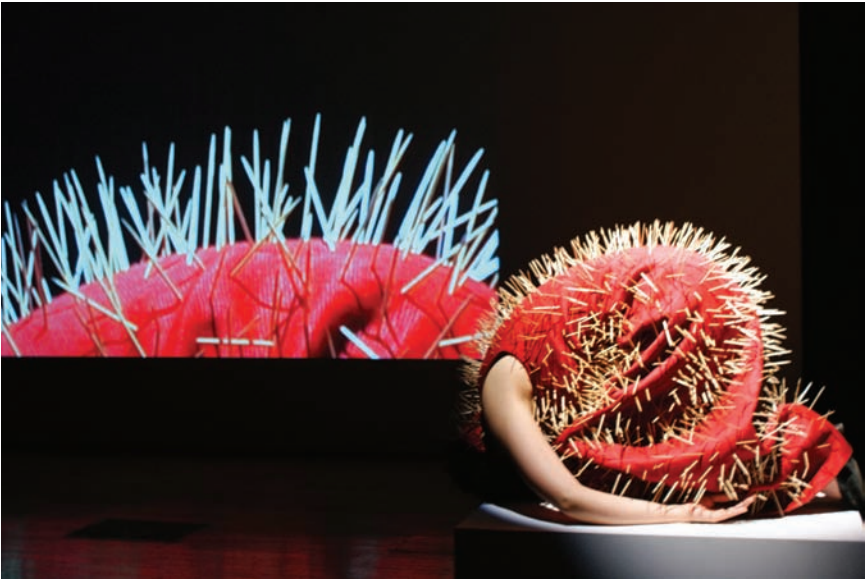
WOMAN IN RED

2010, Mixed media, acrylic, and embroidery with sequins and beads on canvas, 39.5 in x 59 in

Courtesy Leila Heller Gallery

KEZBAN BATIBEKI

Kezban Batibeki has been widely regarded as one of the most insightful artists concerned with popular culture involved in the contemporary art scene in Turkey. She works on installations, short films and photographs about women. Her work has been featured in seventeen solo exhibitions and she has participated in numerous Turkish and international group shows. Batibeki publishes extensively in art journals and has also worked as a production designer and photographer in the film industry. She received her education at the Fine Arts Faculty of Istanbul Marmara University's Graphic Arts Department in 1980. She lives and works in Istanbul.



DEFIANT

2009, Video performance

NEZAKET EKICI

The idea, the thought, the draft are the basis for the execution of my artwork. Ideas come from everyday life situations, social and cultural atmospheres. Then the idea expresses itself in the performances and installation art. As well as this, I use the body as a means of expression.

The artistic idea is expressed using the body alone, as part of the installation and within the context of an audience.

The subjects I deal with are time, movement, space, material, body, action/ interaction. I try to create works of art that leave for the viewer, free space for associations and new possibilities. I take a special situation from everyday life and without illustrating this one for one; I place it into a new context.

I aim to create art where all of the elements are connected together to form a whole work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk).





**HAGIA SOPHIA, PART II
(THE PURPLE ROBE)**

2013, Colored pencil and ink on
mylar mounted gouache on paper

PAUL FABOZZI

Many of my recent drawings and paintings grow out of a process of visually dissecting and translating photographs I have taken of specific sites in a number of international cities, including Rome, New York, and Istanbul.

For this exhibition I chose to work from a photograph I took of Hagia Sophia, Istanbul's most timeless monument—a fool's game, some would say, yet sometimes I do not choose the site as much as the site chooses me. Inevitably, it seems, working with a particular site reveals as much about my own consciousness as it does about the location. This give and take between experience, memory, history, and visual interpretation is at the heart of my work.

In many ways Hagia Sophia contains the history of Istanbul. It features a circle that gathers light, a point in space that defines an ever-shifting edge. Its history disrupts hard distinctions between East and West. It cannot be easily claimed or located. A domed container, it holds memories of the ages. It has witnessed Christian and Muslim rituals and prayers, centuries of political and military tensions, and the subjective gazes of modern travelers.

Each translation begets another translation.



MUTA-MORPHOSIS #122 / ISTANBUL

2012, Photography

MURAT GERMEN

The concept of “muta-morphosis,” a combination of the notions of mutation and metamorphosis, and the connected artwork series was obtained by reducing panoramic images on one axis. This compression points to the dynamics between the urban components that can persist and the ones that vanish in the various historical, residential and business urban districts.

Muta-morphosis series fits contents of multiple glances into one. These photographs are of documentary kind, there is no conscious insertion or removal of any details during post-production; mere components that disappear are the ones that get lost in horizontal compression. The lack of a single perspectival structure due to multiplicity of perspectives after panoramic imaging, can be linked to Ottoman miniatures, which in turn, connects the global contemporary representation to its local traditional counterpart.



TEN SECCADES

2009–2012, Handwoven
double knot pile rugs, wool

PETER HRISTOFF

“Seccade” is a term used for carpets that are used when praying. The seccade creates a sacred space; practically, it provides a clean surface on which to pray. Traditionally, seccades have a “prayer niche” (the mihrab) in the design of the composition. The mihrab is always placed in the direction of Mecca when praying, it indicates the “top” of the seccade, where one’s head will rest when it touches the ground during the praying ritual. The work that I am exhibiting “Ten Seccades” reflects my interest in traditional Turkish pile rug making as well as an on-going interest in the role of religious belief, magical thinking and the function of praying in contemporary society. Each rug represents a different prayer / what we—read: man—pray for, literally or figuratively. A grouping of seccades placed together, in close proximity to each other, implies the difficulty of penetrating a community of shared beliefs. I would like to think that these rugs and my interest in rug making does not stray far from the early attitudes of Anatolian weavers -- that the rug is a journal, recording the fears, the hopes, the joys, the tears (and the prayers) of its creator.

All ten of the rugs were originally drawn on the appropriate type of graph paper for a double-knot rug in Gullubahce, Turkey and woven for me by the wonderful weavers of Priene Hali workshop.



HOMEWORK

2010-2013, Installation from "School Kit": pencilbox, notebook covers, notebooks, pencils, pencil sharpener, stickers, eraser, 1 certificate of appreciation in school bag

GÖZDE ILKIN

Homework is an installation piece that reacts to the early-age confrontation to the socio-political threats by applying symbols of governmental power and military violence on school supplies and stationery.

"Where I grew up, kids matured before they actually behaved and lived as children. It may be called pre-mature in a social meaning", the artist explains. Instead of being protected and cherished, children are confronted to these ideologies, without a sufficient hindsight.

In today's increasing marketing and propaganda, children became an important target. Whether they are taken in political crossfires or considered as consumers and market prescribers, they are victims of adult decisions. All around the world, I could mention kids as the victims of gentrification, living by themselves in the street, or constantly courted by mass media. They are also used as a tool in some more radical actions: adults encourage them to throw stones to the police, as they cannot be arrested due to their young age.

I made this piece for those kids who are taking part in this scene unwillingly. This is why I designed a special school kit that reflects this reality.



HÜZÜN

2013, Video

MICHAEL MARFIONE

Turkey was first introduced to me through stories passed down from the elder generation in my hometown of Gaeta, Italy. As it was told, for many years during the ninth century Turkish pirates used Gaeta as a hub, hiding in a cave now named La Grotta del Turco, sleeping during the days, and raping and pillaging the small fishing village at night. These childhood legends and the exoticism of Turkey have lived with me ever since.

During my four-month stay in Istanbul, I was often mistaken for a native. I would sometimes go along to see how far I could stretch it, enjoying my fictional Turkish self. In my own head I would see myself as a person of no overt background, boundaries, or characterizations. But that's just not true — I am a man raised in Italy and brought to NYC, and you can tell all of that just by looking at or listening to me. It's a fascinating animalistic phenomenon — not only to perceive but also to categorize.

This idea of being mistaken, the slippage of identity, was the seed for this project. When I first visited Çemberlita Hamamı as a tourist, the gravity and theatrical splendor of the space impressed me. This 16th century public bathhouse was once a place where politicians and socialites came to discuss art and politics. Today, it's a place that solely serves tourists. I knew that with its spatial grandeur and its allusions to the bathhouses of Rome, the space needed to be the site of my next video. I decided to take a simple tourist experience and use it as a platform for exploring humor, identity, and ritual.

Hüzün is my way of superimposing myself onto Turkish culture. Whether it manifests itself spatially, physically or socially, it adds to this continued feeling of being a stranger in a foreign place.



TURKEY I

2011, Photography

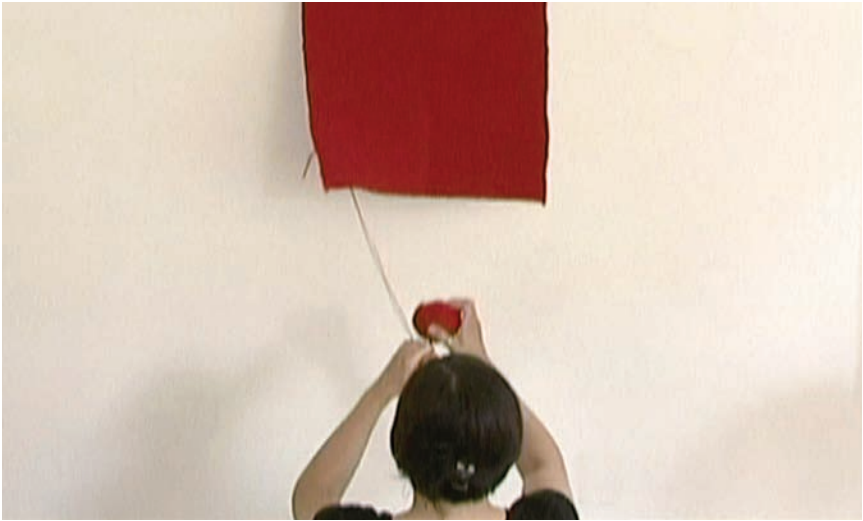
ALEX MOREL

Europe for quite some time now has been going through a transition, which is greatly transforming all aspects of society in its different regions. As in all moments of transition, there are tensions and resistance, but inevitably this evolution moves forward. The European Union, economic integration, immigration, cultural diversity (assimilation and clashes), are just some of the defining elements of the new face and landscape of Europe. Turkey throughout history has been a crossroad between Europe and the Middle East; and as a result, a place where all transitional elements might be found in their most acute depiction especially in a city like Istanbul.

By visually documenting this city as an outsider, not European and not Middle Eastern, I hoped to find in the face of Istanbul the characteristics that might start to define the New Europe. I limited myself, without the preconception of images, to map certain areas and situations that might provide me with insights. For example: the streets, sites of cultural interest and exchange, centers of secular as well as spiritual activities, areas of international confluence (commerce, tourism, etc.), as well as different residential neighborhoods, markets and industrial sites, corporate and governmental environments, and more.

Due to unexpected circumstances, I adopted what might be called the new high-low tech of the smartphone camera, which allowed me to mimic a more traditional b&w film stock. These different elements of intentions and approach, (a foreigner visiting an exotic land, the confluence of history and the present in the landscape of the country, and the contradictions between photographic technology and the resulting images), served to connect and create a revolving dialogue with a particular genre and history of the medium: that of photography as a tool for archeological survey and the documentation of early expeditions, such as the XIX century works of Maxime Du Camp or Timothy O'Sullivan.

This work looks at the surface of the country for hints of underlying clues that would lead to better understanding of a place at a geographic, cultural, and political crossroad.



AN ATTEMPT TO UNRAVEL MYTH

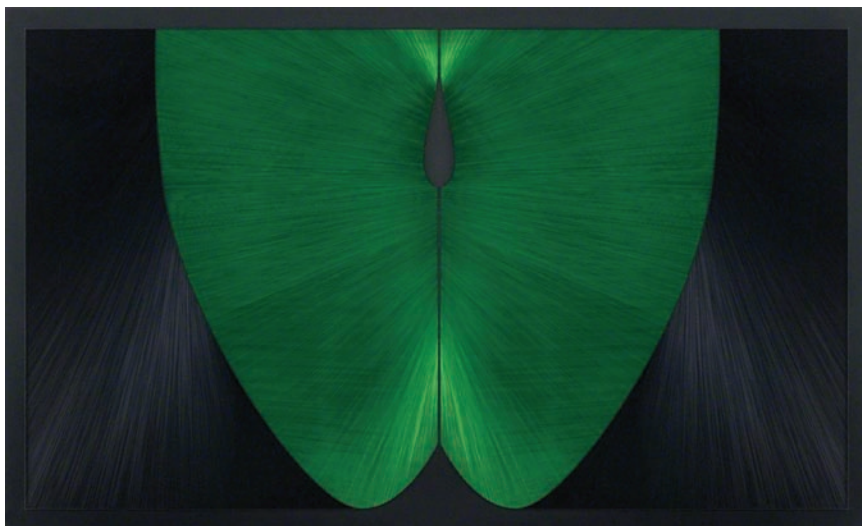
2010, Digital Video

ARZU OZKAL

Societies have tremendous respect for their national symbols. At times of national events, they become displays of patriotism, provoking thousands to kill and or die in the name of honoring them. In this performance I'm unraveling a red rag similar to an actual flag hung on the wall. The purpose of my performance is not to criticize any nationalist feeling, but rather stimulate audience with questions: What drives the impulse to display a flag? Why should anyone feel the need to exalt his or her own country over another?

1. According to Kant, we never know things as they truly are - as things in themselves - but only in terms of how they appear to us, as phenomena. We learn to respect our nations' flag, the aura of the flag much earlier then we understand about the social and cultural background that it is embedded into. In fact, one can blindly worship a piece of fabric long before internalizing any of the values it stands for. Although my act might be perceived somehow offensive — damaging a flag is still strictly forbidden in many countries—, my intension is not to damage but perhaps to disarm the symbol, take it back to its primal state; to a state of basic materiality. And before it becomes a(nother) phenomena, simply ask again: Would the big red yarn I'm holding in my hands still symbolize the same cultural values?

1. Dani Cavallaro (2001). Critical and cultural theory: thematic variations. The Athlone Press. New Jersey.



GREEN APPLE

2012, Wires, screws, wood, 71 in x 118 in

Courtesy Leila Heller Gallery

GULAY SEMERCIOĞLU

Semercioğlu forms geometric, 3-dimensional compositions by weaving thin vibrantly colored metal wires on to a wooden plank. More than twenty layers are created from one long piece of metal wire wound around numerous nails. The results are abstract, perhaps even meditative, works inspired by the shapes of microorganisms, simple leaf forms, mountains, and even water. Light and perception play a significant role in Semercioğlu's oeuvre. The aluminum knit works transform visually as light reflects off the work at different points according to the time of the day and the viewing position.

"At first glance the eye is unsure whether it is looking at a textile or industrial object, at handicraft or machine product," observes journalist Melik Kaylan in his essay from the catalog accompanying *Variations on Line*. "There is in the work a suggestion simultaneously of Oriental sumptuousness and of futurist design. Indeed, the eye is unsure all around, but it feels ravished by a profound and striking visual utterance that keeps echoing."

Semercioğlu is aware that her work evokes dualities. "I like that [my art] makes contradictions exist and reconcile." It takes Gulay weeks, even months of painstaking handiwork, often using miles of wire, as ancient textile makers once did, to create her pieces. The Semercioğlu family originally hailed from Turkey's eastern city of Gaziantep where such crafts once flourished. "My grandfather, when he was bored or unhappy, used to resort to weaving. My grandmother used to win prizes for her embroidery and jewelry. It's in my genes and in the process." To that organic and traditional process she has added the rigors of structure and form. "What I have discovered in myself is a calling, an appetite for architectural design. In my thoughts I am designing buildings."



FOUR

2013

ORKAN TELHAN

Today, many children are exposed to belief systems as early as three to four years. All over the world, parents send their children to religious study groups, courses and summer camps to teach their kids the fundamentals of their own religion. Children's earliest contact with social codes, moral values, opinions, and beliefs can be formed by a single voice or authority that represents the perspective of a specific community, religion, or belief system. Today, as technologies of reading advance, it is possible to study religious topics with hyperlinks, images, animations, sound and video. However, these technologies do not necessarily challenge the sources of knowledge or opinion. Children still read by themselves or follow the single voice who presents the content to them.

"Four" is an installation that features special readers that address the needs of a more discursive religious pedagogy. These readers connect with each other and form "reading ensembles" among two to four children. The screens of the tablets make a shared reading surface and let the children read, watch and learn together. The dual-tablet interface presents information with alternative points of view by using custom content analysis software. Children get exposed to perspectives from multiple points of view that span across different religions, belief systems, orthodox, secular, scientific or agnostic opinions at the same time. Thus, children not only can introduce their own preferences and styles of learning by picking from a multitude of sources but also share with each other what they individually encounter during their studies.



STRIPED BELLY

2013, Iznik ware, polychrome
underglaze on fritware,
26.77 in height, 11.81 in diameter

ELIF URAS

My ceramic works address the conflict between modernity and tradition. Produced at the Iznik Foundation on location in Iznik (Nicaea), where the most renowned tiles and ceramics of the Ottoman Empire were created centuries ago, my sculptures incorporate the non-figurative visual vocabulary of Iznik with the female body. Subverting tradition the intricate geometric and naturalistic patterns are employed to paint and draw on voluptuous vessels whose forms allude to the ideas of femininity in a rapidly modernizing yet traditional society.





MEN IN TIES SERIES

2013, Spray and paper cut out,
19.68 in x 13.77 in

HALIL VURUCUOGLU

They are portraits of the inhuman actors of present social deformation and moral molding. The tie is only a symbol; there are people who think they are more prestigious and virtuous than others when they put on a tie. Despite their particular personality, these portraits are a result of a layering of different personalities; that is why I avoid particular descriptions. I depicted these people as ordinary individuals – freakish headshot icons in suits.



