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“**B**y making a painting of it, I hoped that the subject would reflect our current state of being in general. Socially torn but taped together – provisional solutions for every day. A

capacity to live on, even when the idea of any kind of ‘whole’ or ‘idea’ has been diminished,” says Turkish artist Leyla Gediz speaks of her 2016 painting *Broken*. The work was included in her most recent exhibition at *The Pill* in Istanbul and referenced a window broken in the studio of the artist that was never fixed and whose brokenness went from a temporary state to permanent character and lasting identity. The metaphor here is nearly an architectural formula for the constant state of transition of life in Turkey nowadays. Yet too assume this would be too easy game. What the artist is attempting is far from narrating a story; rather it is about internalising storytelling as a whole.

Like everything else in the show, the painting stems from Leyla’s studio, but the exhibition is not a herbarium or a cabinet. The different objects appear unambitious at first, in the way a diary tells you about something: Boxes, shattered glass, photographs, or a receipt from the supermarket, some kind of debris. Yet pieced together it is possible to observe the condition they are addressing which is embodied in the untranslatable title of the show, *Serpilen*. “The word implies an entity that blooms as it is being dispersed,” reads the text of the exhibition. The artist completes the thought: “It reflects the way the works are spread around the space (spatial meaning) and it also refers to something organic that is caught in the moment of ‘becoming’ or

# BLOSSOMING *in the* HERE *and* NOW

*An exhibition of work by Leyla Gediz at Istanbul’s The Pill offers an investigative look into the artist’s self-development, writes* **Arie Amaya-Akkermans**

fulfilling itself by growing.”

The dictionary definition is ‘sparse’ or thinly spread, even austere or precarious. Some of the technical definitions in the Turkish language, referred to the treatment of images, come closer to the sense of the show: “Serpilen” is also the name given to pixels that are oversaturated in the digital camera sensor or the smearing of regions of the electronic image where the detected brightness is at an excessive level. In works such as *Doctrinaire* (2016), conceived as a family portrait or *Histoire Universelle* (2016), you can experience this sense of saturation with images and with the representation of traumatic experience and violent history that is at the heart of *Serpilen*; the upfront contradiction between the traditional clarity of Gediz’s painting and the obscure moment of the here and now.

The return to the studio and the studio material as a source has never been absent in the artist’s work. Gediz has always opted for a soft aesthetic with a reduced palette and minimal resources – an opening of a new horizon that she shares with a number of Turkish artists of her generation. It is no longer possible to represent or speak about “the way we live now” accurately without either being lost in the numbness of current language where the words that we have do not match our experiences, or become employed by reality in legitimising an aesthetic of violence. Through these discreet objects, boxes or chains – the metaphors here are not so discreet: They refer to migration, displacement, violence, and intimidation – each an element that is faced in present day Turkey.

It is in their non-specific nature that Leyla Gediz’s works – significantly more stern and thoughtful after a number of years outside of the gallery system – speak more directly to the audience. Coming to *The Pill*, a new gallery in the Balat neighborhood, still undergoing physical transformations that shed light on its grandiose past as a shelter for minorities in the Ottoman period – and bearing architectural styles that disappeared from central Istanbul during the great fires, *Serpilen* spreads and contracts, adapts to new circumstances, and changes its own narrative with the passing of time. There’s always a mental space for discontinuity here, like when the painting *Rip Curl* (2016) is juxtaposed to the narrative of uncertainty with its affectionate gestures becoming also a means for changing courses and paths.

That the artist chose to display a rather traditional painting exhibition alongside objects from her studio and other artefacts referencing earlier works seemed rather unnecessary and perhaps distracting from the core issue here: change and transition, even resilience and resistance. Moreover, the exhibition would have been perfectly complete without them. Nevertheless, the discontinuity and uncertainty that ooze out in between various moments of this exhibition – and each work is a different one, are more than moods or states of mind; over time they become the navigational apparatus of the show, setting the mood and therefore, defining the possible audience. *Serpilen* is also a story about a kind of biological change, certain processes of rebirth,



Clockwise, from above left: *Anka*. 2016. Wooden console, canvas, brass. 45 x 99 x 110cm; *Broken*. 2016. Oil on canvas. 38 x 60 x 4cm; an installation view featuring (centre) *Peekaboo*. 2016. Kraft paper, PVC foam board, car tyres, and teddy bear. Variable dimensions; *19 Ocak*. 2015. Oil on canvas. 60 x 60 x 2.5 cm.



Facing page: *Default (Self)*. 2016. Oil on canvas with extra stretchers. 100 x 70 x 7.5cm.

affirmation, and renewal.

The exhibition was conceived during an important period in the artistic production of Gediz – in between motherhood, upheaval, and decline, and punctuated by a tentative migration and the new realities of a region in turmoil. Even so the works on show are still loyal to the artist’s method. *Serpilen* never aimed to be a war story or a salvation epic. From a distinctively intimate viewpoint the artist is reclaiming the self – what is lost in the documentary turn of the contemporary, grasping the surface of the real world through essence and approximation rather than imitation or representation. Is the exhibition perhaps spreading too thin when it comes to present times? It is certainly part of the precariousness of today’s world so readily taken hostage by history, in which case, Gediz’s clarity can only be a silent guide into our own captivity. ■

*Serpilen ran until 2 April 2017. thepill.co*