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*Leylâ Gediz*

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Leylâ Gediz approaches painting as a thought process and discursive practice to explore the relationship between figuration and its conditions of possibility. Using a limited palette, her process-oriented practice incorporates fragments of everyday life filtered through contemporary image-processing technologies. Her paintings are structural experiments that dislocate and rearticulate the relationship between background and figure, simultaneously deconstructing painting into its constitutive materials and processes and rearticulating it through techniques of assemblage.

Gediz's painting is about recomposing the world from the standpoint of what is usually kept out of the frame, drawing attention to what constitutes the support structures of everyday life and painting as a practice. Cardboard boxes, packaging units, stretchers, cables, and joints, made to be compatible with the objects they support, connect, and protect, are at the center of her compositions. Attempting to define a perspective through the margins, starting from the subordinate and nomadic positions of bodies, objects, and tools, Gediz operates like a surrealist ethnographer of displacement and diasporic existence, engaged in the excavation of the emotions that everyday fragments evoke when taken out of their literal and metaphorical backgrounds.

These fragments are played out through random, found, mundane yet useful objects, people close to her heart, the light and shadow they cast on each other, and their sometimes awkward volume in space. At first glance, Gediz's compositions seem to pay homage to the grid as a primary form of spatial organization, repeated through the forms of the canvas, stretcher, screen, and net; but the meticulous painterly operations of shading that distance every other fragment from its background fully reinscribe them in the realm of mimesis. Through her subtle painterly composition, Leyla Gediz conveys an unstable, strange, and hybrid reality that hovers in that fragile zone between fiction and non-fiction.

Leylâ Gediz (b. Istanbul, 1974) lives and works in Lisbon. She completed her MA in Visual Arts at Goldsmiths College (London, 1999) and a BA in Fine Art (Painting) at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL (London, 1998).

Her recent solo exhibitions include “Home Staging” at CAC Cosmos (Lisbon, 2024); “Cosa Mentale”, Galerie L’Atlas XTHEPILL (Paris, 2022); “LayerFromBackground” supported by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Edificio EPUL de Bartolomeu da Costa Cabral, Martim Moniz (Lisbon, 2022); “Denizens”, THE PILL (Istanbul, 2019); “ANAGRAM”, OJ Art Space (Istanbul, 2018). Her notable group exhibitions include “This Play” cur. by Emre Baykal, ARTER (Istanbul, 2022); “Hybridish” cur. by Alistair Hicks, Georg Kargl Fine Arts (Vienna, 2020); “Words Are Very Unnecessary”, cur. Selen Ansen, ARTER (Istanbul, 2019); “The New Normal”, The Hangar (Beirut, 2017); Freundschaftsspiel Istanbul, Freiburg Museum Für Neue Kunst (Freiburg, 2016); “Every Inclusion Is An Exclusion of Other Possibilities”, SALT Beyoglu (Istanbul, 2015); “Skeptical Thoughts on Love” cur by Misal Adnan Yildiz, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (Stuttgart, 2014); Istanbul Eindhoven-SALTVANAbbe: Post ‘89, SALT Beyoglu (Istanbul, 2012); “Dream and Reality - Modern and Contemporary Women Artists From Turkey”, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art (Istanbul, 2011).

Leylâ Gediz’ work is included in prestigious public and private collections such as Istanbul Modern, Arter (Istanbul), ARCO Foundation (Spain) and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven). In 2023 she was the recipient of the Sovereign Portuguese Art Prize by public votes.

## LEYLÂ GEDİZ

1974, Istanbul.

Lives and works between Istanbul and Lisbon.

### Education

- 1999 MA Visual Arts, Goldsmiths College, London, UK
- 1998 BA Fine Art, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London, UK
- 1997 Erasmus Exchange, Städelschule für Bildende Künste, Frankfurt am Main, DE
- 1994 Foundation Course, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, UK

### Solo Exhibitions

- 2024 Stagehand, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR  
Curtain Call, Cur. Orsola Vannocci Bonsi and Mattia Tosti, CAC - Cosmos, Lisbon, PT
- 2023 Missing Cat, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London, UK
- 2022 Cosa Mentale, L'Atlas X THE PILL, Paris, FR  
Layer From Background, produced in partnership with Tecla PLAY, supported by The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Edifício EPUL de Bartolomeu da Costa Cabral, Martim Moniz, Lisboa, PT
- 2021 A Solo Presentation: Leylâ Gediz, The Digital Space of the Community, ARCO E-EXHIBITIONS  
Nocturne, Aç Yazı 13, Aç Yazı için 32 kapak, Norgunk, Dirimart, Istanbul, TR
- 2019 Denizens, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
- 2018 ANAGRAM, OJ Art Space in collaboration with THE PILL, Istanbul, TR
- 2017 Serpilen, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR  
Parabéns, Amsterdam Gallery Night at Akıncı, Amsterdam, NL
- 2014 Kilimli Konak, Topaçacı İhlamur Yolu, Istanbul, TR
- 2012 Reverb, Kulüp Külâh, Istanbul, TR
- 2011 Coming Soon, Rampa, Istanbul, TR
- 2010 Under Construction, Curated by Marita Muukkonen, Kaapelin Galleria, HIAP, Helsinki, FI  
Subject: Free, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
- 2009 noa noa, Galerist / Tophane, Istanbul, TR  
Follower, Österreichisches Sankt Georgs Kolleg, Istanbul, TR
- 2008 Perfect Moment, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
- 2007 It Takes Two, Fabian-Claude Walter Gallery, Zurich, CH
- 2006 Passenger, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, USA
- 2005 Uniform, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
- 2003 Keep it a Secret, Galerist, Istanbul, TR
- 2002 Fake Freedom Show, Galerist, Istanbul, TR

### Group Exhibitions

- 2024 Painting Today, cur. Didem Yazıcı, Burcu Çimen, Yapı Kredi Culture, Arts and

Publishing, İstanbul, TR

Es Estou Aqui, - Leylâ Gediz, Luisa Cunha and Rajja Malka, cur. Isabel Carlos, 119 Marvila Studios, Lisbon, PT

Walking within Memories - 4th Austrian High School Artists Exhibition, cur. Melike Bayık, Metrohan, Istanbul, TR

Suppose You Are Not, cur. Selen Ansen, Arter, Istanbul, TR

2023 Winter Exhibition, cur. Purdy Hicks Gallery, London, UK

The 2023 Sovereign Portuguese Art Prize, Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes, Lisbon, PT

Porta Entreaberta, cur. Francisca Valador, supported by The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Ajuda, Lisbon, PT

Collective Healing, cur. Ayça Okay, Metrohan, Istanbul, TR

7 Collectors 7 Artists, Ferda Art Platform, Istanbul, TR

2022 AS IF IT COULDN'T, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR

ThisPlay, cur. Emre Baykal, ARTER, Istanbul, TR

2021 Kartografya, cur. Ali Akay, Beyoğlu Kültür Yolu Festivali, Istanbul, TR

Interactions, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, TR

Women: Navigating Presence and Absence - Power of the Word III, cur. Shahd Wadi, coordinated by Jessica Hallett, Diana Pereira and Susana Gomes da Silva, Islamic East Gallery, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, PT

2020 Hybridish, cur. Alistair Hicks, Georg Kargl Fine Arts, Vienna, AT

2019 Almost There, cur. Seyhan Musaoğlu, Teona Burkiashvili, Tatiana Kochubinska, British Council, London, UK

Words Are Very Unnecessary, cur. Selen Ansen, ARTER, Istanbul, TR

2018 I Caught A Rat, We Caught Some Air, cur. Patrick C. Haas and Joans Schenk, Mélange, Art Düsseldorf, DE

Positive Space, cur. Alper Turan, Operation Room, Amerikan Hospital Art Gallery, Istanbul, TR

2017 Ev / Home, cur. Derya Yücel, Evliyağil Museum, Ankara, TR

Surreal House, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR

There is no Rhinoceros in the Room! Leyla Gediz, Deniz Gül and Ali Taptık, Ariel Sanat, Istanbul, TR

The New Normal, organized by Murat Adash and Hiba Farhat, The Hangar, Beirut, LB

2016 Freundschaftsspiel Istanbul : Freiburg, Museum Für Neue Kunst, Freiburg, DE  
Ohne, mekân68, Vienna, AT

States of Portraits, cur. Ali Akay, açikekran, Levent, Istanbul, TR

2015 Self-Help, İnci Furni and Leyla Gediz, Produced by Bige Örer, Elhamra Han, Beyoğlu, Istanbul, TR

Every Inclusion is an Exclusion of Other Possibilities, Salt Beyoğlu, Istanbul, TR  
Middle of the Path, Schau\_Raum, cur. Didem Yazıcı, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Freiburg, DE

2014 The Moving Museum, Istanbul, TR

- Summer Resort for a Song, cur. Borga Kantürk, Depo, Istanbul, TR  
Skeptical Thoughts on Love, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Artistic Director: Misal Adnan Yıldız, Stuttgart, DE
- 2013 Trocadero, cur. Nazlı Gürlek, Nesrin Esirtgen Collection, Istanbul, TR  
Art Barter, 5533, Istanbul, TR  
Kırlı Çıkı, bantmag mekan, Moda, Istanbul, TR  
BiennaleOnline, hosted by ART+ / artistic director: Jan Hoet Kent, ODTÜ Sanat 14, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Ankara, TR
- 2012 Istanbul Eindhoven-SALT VanAbbe: Post '89, SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul, TR  
Gerçeklik Terörü, cur. Periferi Kolektif (Rafet Arslan and Alper Ince), Depo, Istanbul, TR
- 2011 Dream and Reality – Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul, TR  
Confessions of Dangerous Minds Contemporary Art from Turkey, Phillips De Pury & Company Rooms, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- 2010 Second Door, cur. Elif Varol Ergen, İpek Zeynep Aran, CER Modern, Ankara, TR  
Fantasy & Island, cur. Anne Alessandri, Çelenk Bafra, Adnan Yıldız, FRAC Corsica, FR  
A Dream...but not Yours: Contemporary Art from Turkey, cur. Esra Sargedik Öktem, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, USA
- 2009 Seriously Ironic, cur. Dolores Denaro & Isin Önel, Centre Pasquart, Biel, CH  
On Connait La Chanson, cur. Ali Akay, Aksanat, Istanbul, TR
- 2008 Made in Turkey © 1978- 2008, Paulskirche, Frankfurt, DE  
Save As... , Triennale Bovisa Museum, cur. Derya Yücel in collaboration with Santral Istanbul, Milan, IT  
Last Things, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, DE  
Sampling, cur. Locus Athens, Museum of Folk Art, Athens, GR
- 2007 Flat Tyre, K2, Izmir, TR
- 2006 Acıyla Karışık, Garanti Platform Contemporary Art Centre, Istanbul, TR  
Istanbul, Sommer Contemporary Art Gallery, TelAviv, IL  
Works on Paper, Galerist (dir. Murat Pilevneli), Istanbul, TR
- 2005 Eindhoven – Istanbul, Van Abbemuseum, Curators: Eva Meyer-Hermann, Charles Esche, Eindhoven, NL  
Urban Reality: Focus Istanbul, Martin-Gropius Bau, Berlin, DE  
Hot Spots: Istanbul, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Off Corso, Rotterdam, NL  
Art for... , cur. Vasif Kortun & November Paynter, Garanti Platform Contemporary Art Centre, Istanbul, TR
- 2004 The Ghost Line, cur. Ali Akay & Levent Calikoglu, Aksanat, Istanbul, TR
- 2003 The Power of Language, cur. Ali Akay, Keçiurcu, DSM, Diyarbakır, TR  
Organized Conflict, cur. Fulya Erdemci, Proje 4L, Istanbul, TR  
Where? / Here?, Turkish Art Today, cur. Vasif Kortun – Fulya Erdemci – Emre Baykal, The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama / JP

- 2002 Istanbul Pedestrian Exhibitions 1, cur. Fulya Erdemci, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, TR  
Istanbul As Yakası, Selected By Galeri Nev, Marmara University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Istanbul, TR
- 2001 Egofugal, 7th International Istanbul Biennial, cur. Yuko Hasegawa, Beylerbeyi Palace and Imperial Mint, Istanbul, TR  
Chaos and Communication, 10th Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and Mediterranean, Sarajevo, BIH  
Winds to the Future, Sabancı University Kasa Gallery, Istanbul, TR
- 1999 Cool, Coordinated by Giacomo Picca, London, UK

#### Curatorial Projects

- 2014 I have a feeling, A solo exhibition of works by Murat Şahinler, cur. Leyla Gediz and Misal Adnan Yıldız, Pilot Gallery and Co Pilot, Istanbul, TR
- 2012 Portfolio / İrem Günaydın, solo presentation (eski studio), Nişantaşı, Istanbul, TR  
Artist: İrem Günaydın
- 2010 Leyla's Pop-Up Gallery, Issues 001-006, XOXO The Mag  
Artists: Can Ertaş, İrem Günaydın, Aslı Özdemir, Kemal Özen, Mine Sübiler, Onur Uyar
- 2008 Galeri Splendid, September 2008 – April 2009,  
Art Gallery initiated and run by Leyla Gediz and Derya Demir, Beyoğlu, Istanbul, TR  
Artists: Levent Aygül, Gökçen Cabadan, Nazım Hikmet Richard Dikbaş, Erdem Ergaz, Selim Eyüboğlu, Erdem Helvacıoğlu, Meriç Kara, Sefer Memişoğlu, Sevgi Ortaç, Arzu Oto, Ardan Özmenoğlu, Elçin Poyraz, İlhan Sayın, Tayfun Serttaş, Güneş Terkol
- 2008 Uyuyan ID / The Bitch is Sleeping, cur. Derya Demir and Leyla Gediz and, various locations along İstiklal Street, Istanbul, TR  
Artists: Neşe Çoğal, Özgür Çift, Paula Delgado, Brice Dellsperger, Barış Doğrusöz, Murat Ertel, Erdem Helvacıoğlu, Kaan Karacehennem, Ali Kazma, Emel Kurhan, Bruce LaBruce, Arzu Oto, Serkan Özkaya, Laura Parnes, Oliver Pietsch, Elçin Poyraz, İlhan Sayın, Tayfun Serttaş, Richard Van Loot  
Metaphysics / Erdem Ergaz, solo exhibition cur. Minna L. Henriksson and Leyla Gediz, studio, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, TR  
Artist: Erdem Ergaz  
People Are Made To Steal, Curated by Minna L. Henriksson and Leyla Gediz, studio, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, TR  
Artists: Osman Bozkurt, Antonio Cosentino, Emre Değer, Leyla Gediz, Minna L. Henriksson, İnci Furni, Kaan Karacehennem, KOP-ART, Erden Kosova, Gül Kozacıoğlu, Ferhat Özgür, Elçin Poyraz, November Paynter & Cengiz Tanç
- 2007 Sobe! cur. Leyla Gediz, Bilsar Building, Istanbul, TR  
Artists: Melis Ağazat, Semiha Balcı, Banu Birecikligil, Gökçen Cabadan, Çınar Eslek, Karolin Fişekçi, İnci Furni, Minna Henriksson, Gözde İlkin, Burçak Kaygun, Gülşah Kılıç, KOP-ART, Gül Kozacıoğlu, Tamsin Morse, Ceren Oykut, Gökçe Suvarı, Güneş Terkol, Elif Uras, Nalân Yırtmaç, Pınar Yolaçan

Air Pocket, cur. Leyla Gediz, Galerist (dir. Murat Pilevneli), Istanbul, TR  
Artists: Levent Aygöl, Tufan Baltalar, Gökçen Cabadan, Sefer Memisoglu, İlhan Sayın, Aslı Sungu, Wolfgang Tillmans, Uygur Yılmaz, Bashir Borlakov

#### Residencies

2010 Helsinki International Artist-in-residence Program, FIN  
Artist-in-residence FRAC Corsica, FR

#### Prizes

2023 The 2023 Sovereign Portuguese Art Prize, Public Vote Prize, Lisbon, PT  
1997 Still Life Competition, First Prize, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, Londo, UK  
1996 Steer Medal for Painting, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London, UK  
1996 Still Life Competition, First Prize, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London, UK  
1995 Summer Composition, Second Prize, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London, UK



THE PILL®

*Exhibitions and works*

17 MAYIS MAY 11 AĞUSTOS AUGUST 2024

SERGI EXHIBITION

# BUGÜNÜ

*painting today*

# RESMETMEK

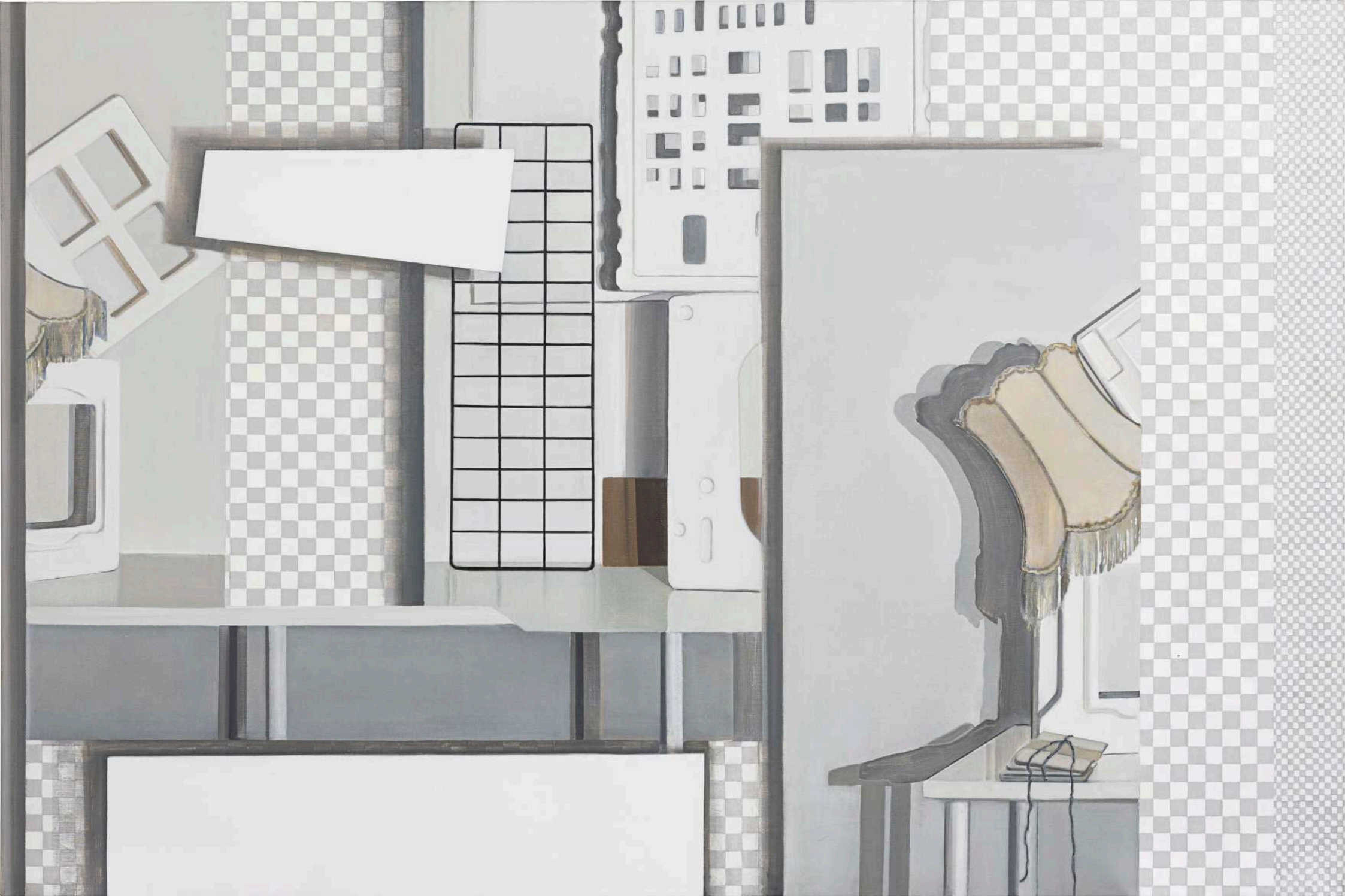
AHU AKGÜN, FİGEN AYDINTAŞBAŞ, CAN AYTEKİN, GÖKHUN BALTACI, TANNER CEYLAN, ANTONIO COSENTINO, CANSU ÇAKAR, TİMUR ÇELİK,  
FULYA ÇETİN, ROJBIN EKİNCİ, EDA GEÇİKMEZ, LEYLÂ GEDİZ, TAYFUN GÜLİNAR, HAKAN GÜRSOYTRAK, ONUR KILIÇ, İHSAN OTURMAK,  
TOYGUN ÖZDEMİR, YAĞIZ ÖZGEN, DENİZ PASHA, KIRKOR SAHAKOĞLU, RUGÜL SERBEST, YAZ TAŞÇI, SEVİL TUNABOYLU, DERYA ÜLKER,  
GÜLNIHAL YILDIZ, NALAN YIRITMAÇ, ECEM YÜKSEL, ERDOĞAN ZÜMRÜTOĞLU

KÜRATÖRLER CURATORS BURCU ÇİMEN, DİDEM YAZICI

 **YapıKredi**  
Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık



*Intro II*, 2020, canvas strips, variable dimensions



*Still Life with Lampshade*, 2023, oil on linen, 120 x 180 x 4 cm

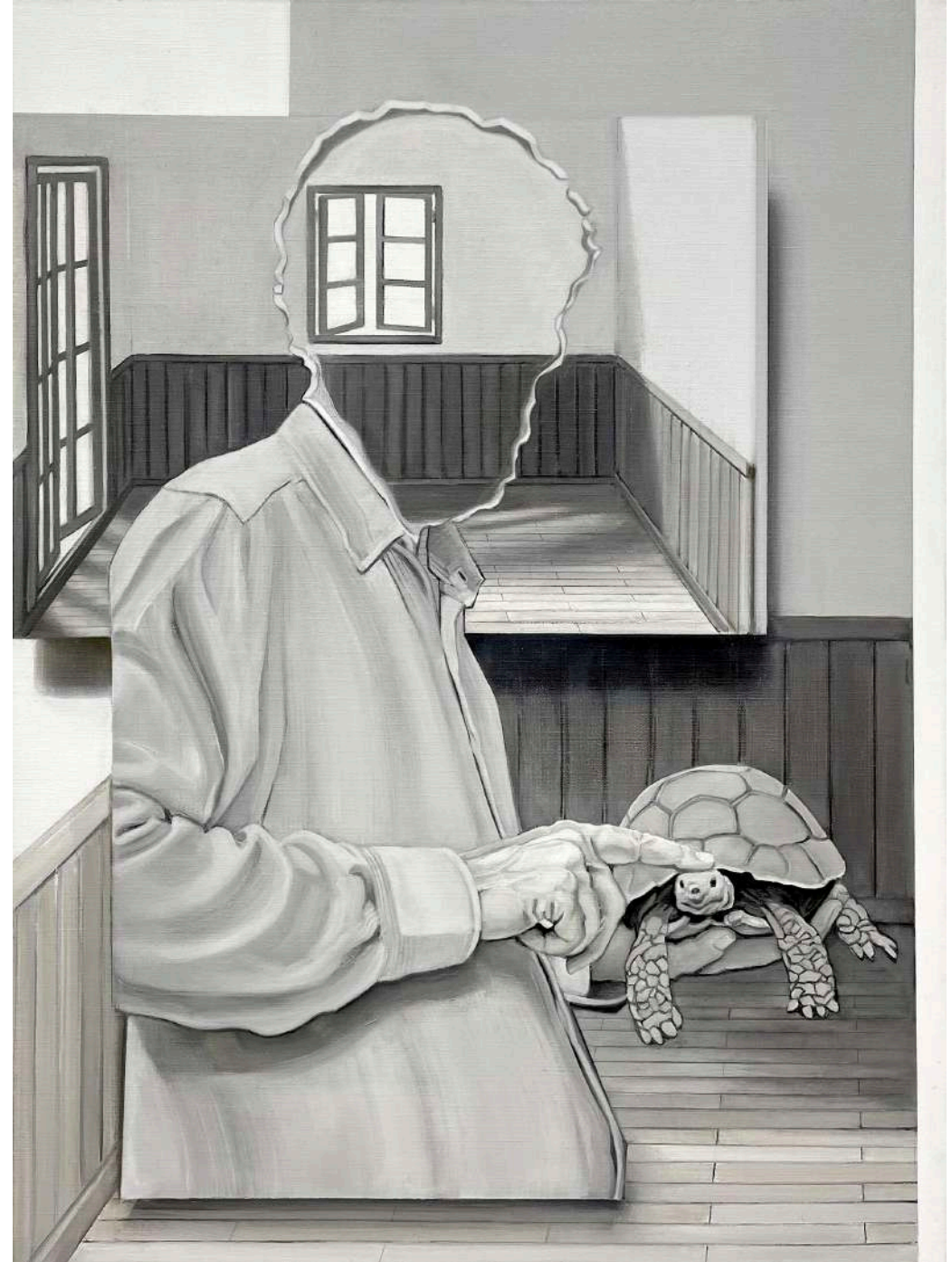
*Still Life With Lampshade* operates as a study of the mutually dependent relationship between abstraction and figuration in painting, as seen through the lens of contemporary visual technologies. The grey and white background pattern of Photoshop not only translates into a multi-layered figure, but also sets the color palette of the entire painting.

Multiple fragments of canvas, stretchers, stretcher bars and other stand-ins for painting coexist in fragmented and layered pieces, describing operations of interruption, superimposition, collage and rearticulation made possible by the digital software, while the careful application of shadows suggests a physical reality where the light source is located on the right hand side, as opposed to the flat and uniform transparency of the computer screen. Through a subtle painterly composition, Leyla Gediz conveys an unstable, strange and hybrid reality, at once physically materializing the software's background and shattering the purity of painting by translating it into a data set manipulated through multiple digital operations.

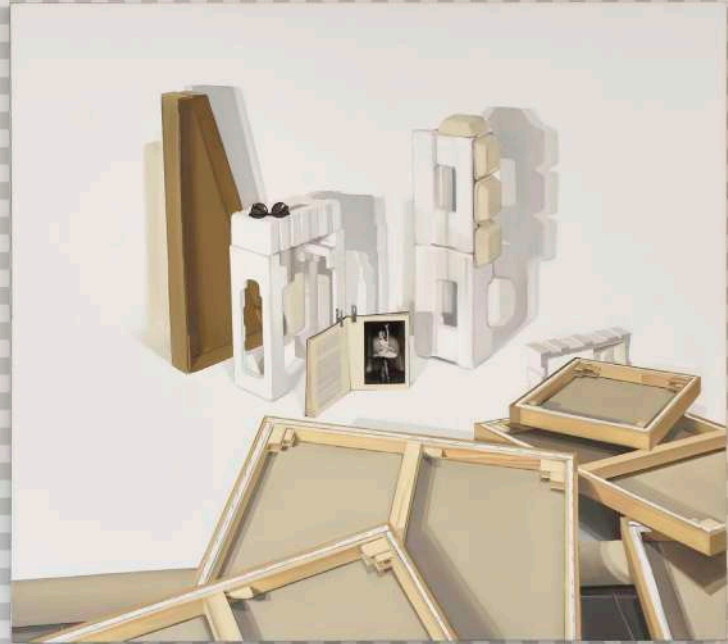
At first sight, *Still Life With Lampshade* seems to be an homage to the grid as the primal and primary form of spatial organization, the matrix underlying modernity repeated through the forms of the window, the canvas, the stretcher, the screen and the network; but the

meticulous painterly operations of shading that distance the lamp from the surface and every other fragment from its background fully reinscribe it in the realm of mimesis.

The painting also attests to an ongoing investigation of space and installation in Gediz' practice: when seen hanging on a wall in physical lighting conditions, the shades surrounding the canvas multiply this interplay and extend the painting's conceptual echo into the exhibition space.



Leylâ Gediz  
*Renksiz Rüya (Colourless Dream)*, 2023  
Oil on linen  
100 x 70 x 4 cm







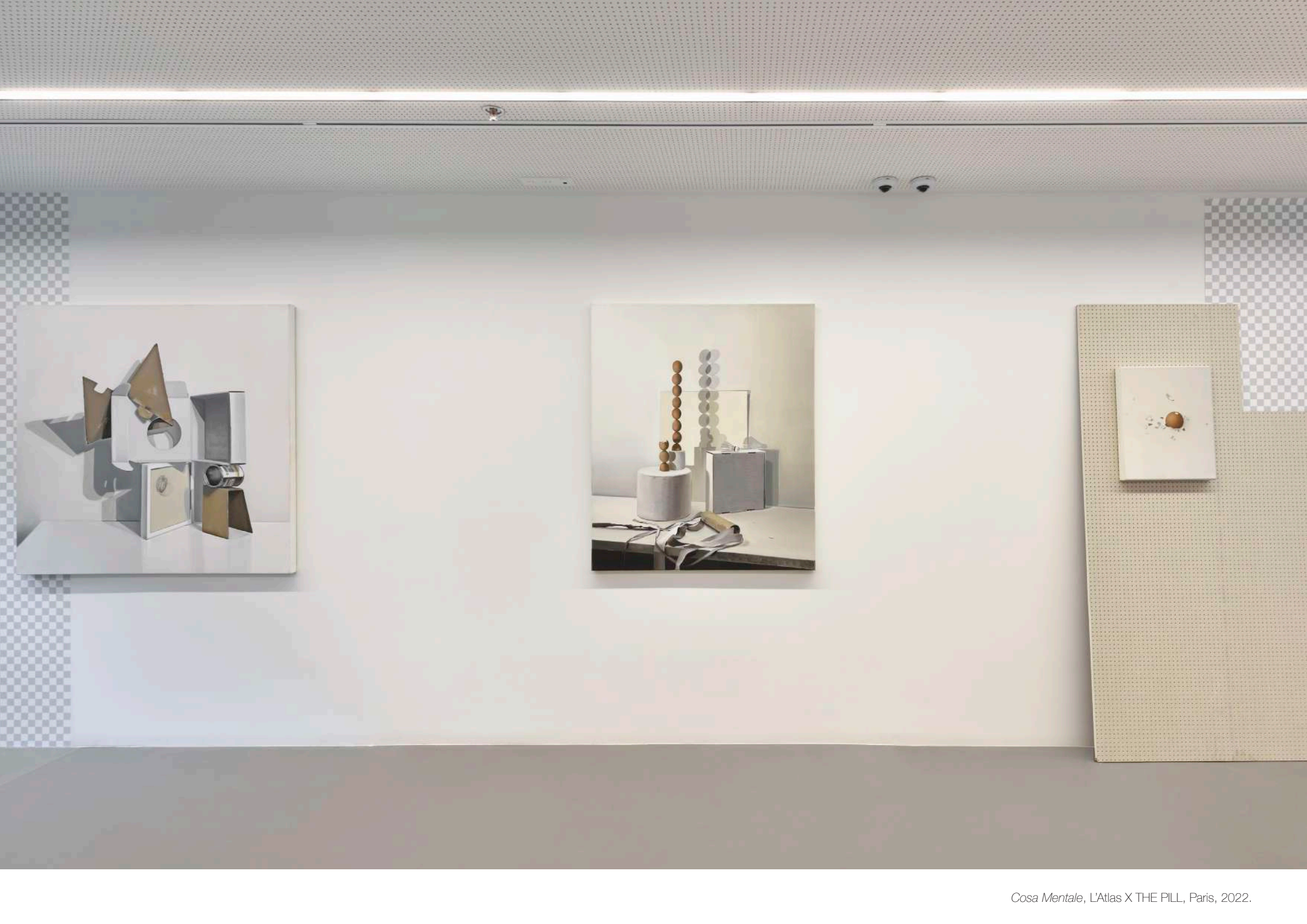


Leylâ Gediz  
*Untitled (Still-Life)*, 2020  
Oil on linen  
120 x 120 cm

*Untitled (Still Life)* is about recomposing the world from the standpoint of what is usually held off the frame, with attention directed toward what constitutes the support structures of daily life and as painting as practice, maintained in displacement. Cardboard boxes and fragments of packaging units made to be compatible with objects they support and protect in daily life take center stage in this assemblage, which also features a framed drawing, but only in the form of a scribble or a sketch for an idea. The composition attempts to define a place through the margins, taking as point of departure precarious and nomadic positions of bodies, objects and tools, while bringing the frame, the discarded package and the support system to the center of focus.

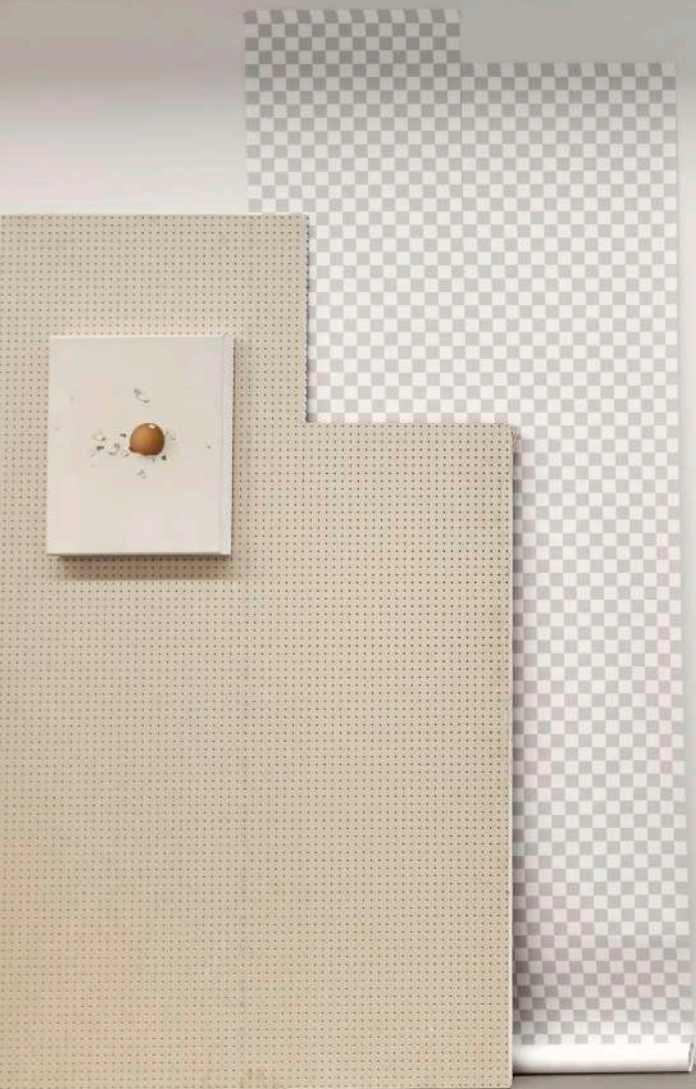
The painting carries a personal ethnography of everyday infrastructural items that shape and define the possibility of painting, and in doing so, reveals the ethnographer-surrealist in Leyla Gediz: logistics of transportation, movement, protective cardboard boxes, a tin can and a framed pencil sketch on paper are freed from their subordinate position and turned into autonomous objects staring back at the viewer with a newfound incompatibility and disarticulations within the composition.







Leylâ Gediz  
*Broken Egg*, 2021  
Oil on linen  
50 x 40 x 4 cm





Leylâ Gediz  
*The Last Layer*, 2021  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 170 x 5 cm





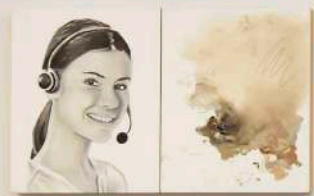


Leylâ Gediz  
*Interrogation Room*, 2020  
Oil on linen  
120 x 100 cm

*Interrogation Room* operates as a study of background and figure relationships through multiple dislocations and re-articulations between bodies, objects and images, and the tools for organizing, classifying and administrating them.

A female figure taking a selfie with an iphone is at the center of the composition, inscribing this painting into the genre of self-portraiture, while this central figure's body replicates the geometric form and flatness of files and folders surrounding and perforating it. The painting's title, along with the unusually flattened relationship between different compositional elements and the presence of an interrogation lamp suggests a forensic, investigative and perhaps authoritarian setting in which the act of taking a selfie, of documenting and witnessing oneself being interrogated, or interrogating, questioning oneself might prove to be a matter of survival and personal autonomy.

The demand for transparency and visibility is met with shadows, shady figures and the opacity of layers while the self-documenting gesture is a reflexive one and suggests a mirror reflection, a closed inner loop, a gesture towards distance, a search for the right distance to see and compose oneself as a figure, or to see and compose a painting, any painting.



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*Afterlife*, 2022, oil and graphite on linen, 110 x 150 cm



*Layer from Background, Martim Moniz Square, Lisbon, 2022.*



*Layer from Background*, 2021, oil and graphite on canvas, 180 x 270 cm



*Layer from Background*, Martim Moniz Square, Lisbon, 2022.



In the turbulent square of Martim Moniz, stands a robust building by the architect Bartolomeu Costa Cabral. Invited by TECLA PLAY Cultural Association, Leylâ Gediz presented an installation of paintings in the interior gallery of the building, which has been cut off from the square over time and plunged into silence. The exhibition, reached by walking up the ramp on the building's façade, allows the site to be visited, and the architecture to function as the public space it was designed to be.

In Photoshop applications, transforming the background into an ordinary layer eliminates the idea of a backdrop. As background loses its gravity, all layers and figures can shift and move independently. Intrigued by the shifts of diasporic beings across the world, Leylâ Gediz is devoted to expanding the field of painting, its settings and its audiences. On this occasion, Gediz displayed a group of works that reflect on the possibilities of being unrooted stemming from her personal experience of coming from Istanbul and living in Lisbon.

Leylâ Gediz  
*Neareastern*, 2020  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 60 cm





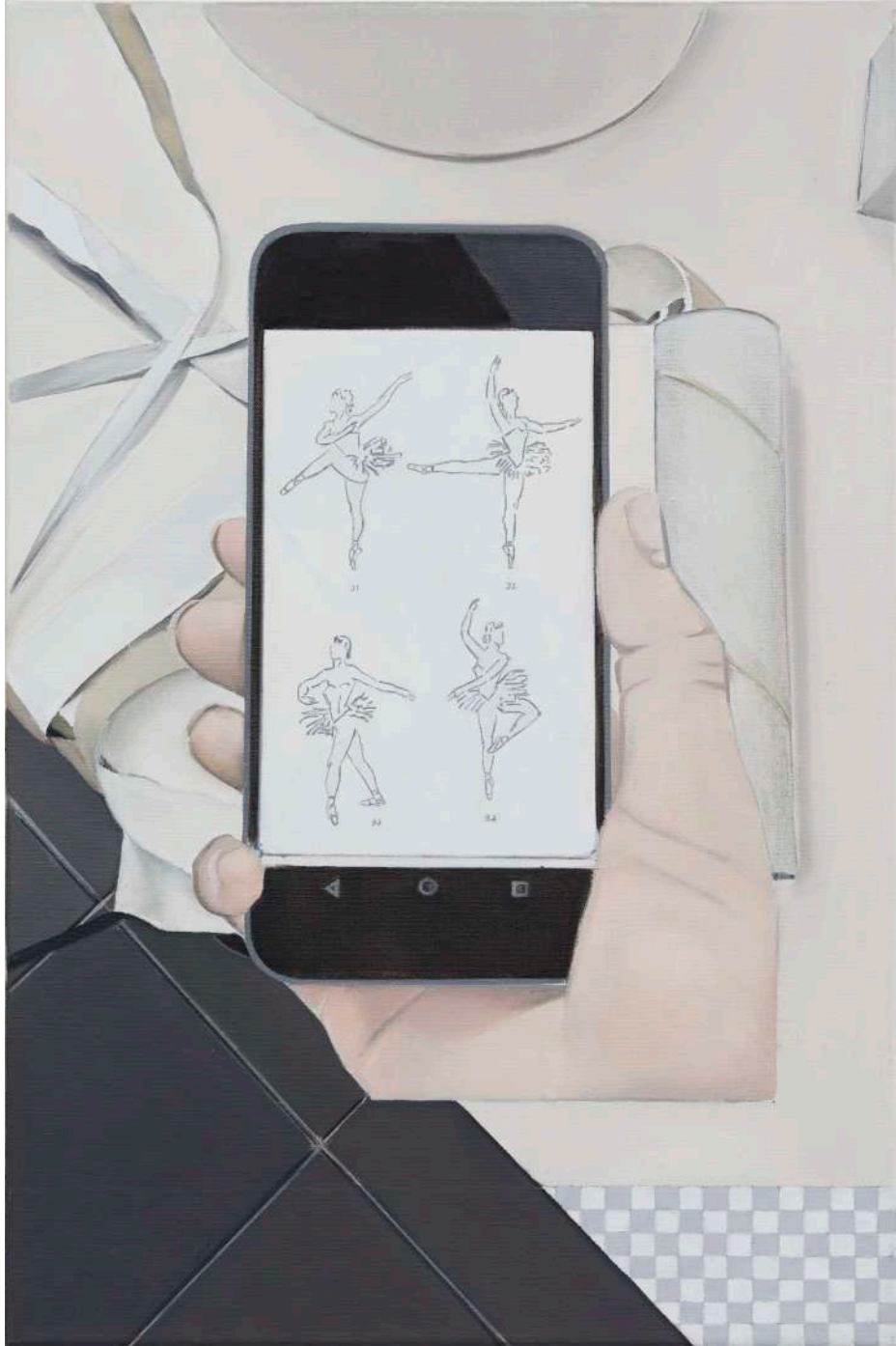
*Layer from Background*, Martim Moniz Square, Lisbon, 2022.



*Layer from Background*, Martim Moniz Square, Lisbon, 2022.



Leylâ Gediz  
*Underpainting, 2021*  
Oil on linen  
120 x 90 cm



Leylâ Gediz  
*Untitled (ballet figures)*, 2021  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 40 cm



*This Play*, cur. Emre Baykal, Arter, Istanbul, 2022



*Denizens, THE PILL, Istanbul, 2019.*



*Denizens, THE PILL, Istanbul, 2019.*



Leylâ Gediz  
*Happy Folder*, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 50 x 3,5 cm



Leylâ Gediz  
*Unhappy Folder*, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 50 x 3,5 cm



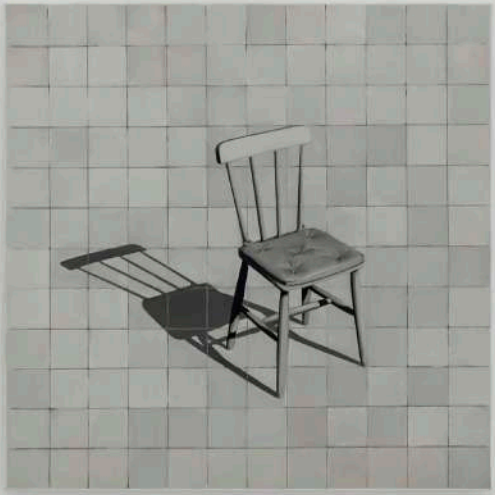
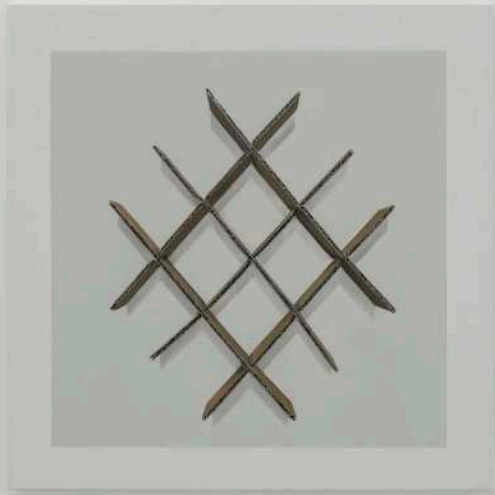






Leylâ Gediz  
*Umarmung*, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
160 x 120 x 4 cm







Leylâ Gediz  
*Erkete (The Lookout)*, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 60 x 4 cm



Leylâ Gediz  
*Taliswoman*, 2019  
Oil on canvas  
190 x 135 x 4 cm





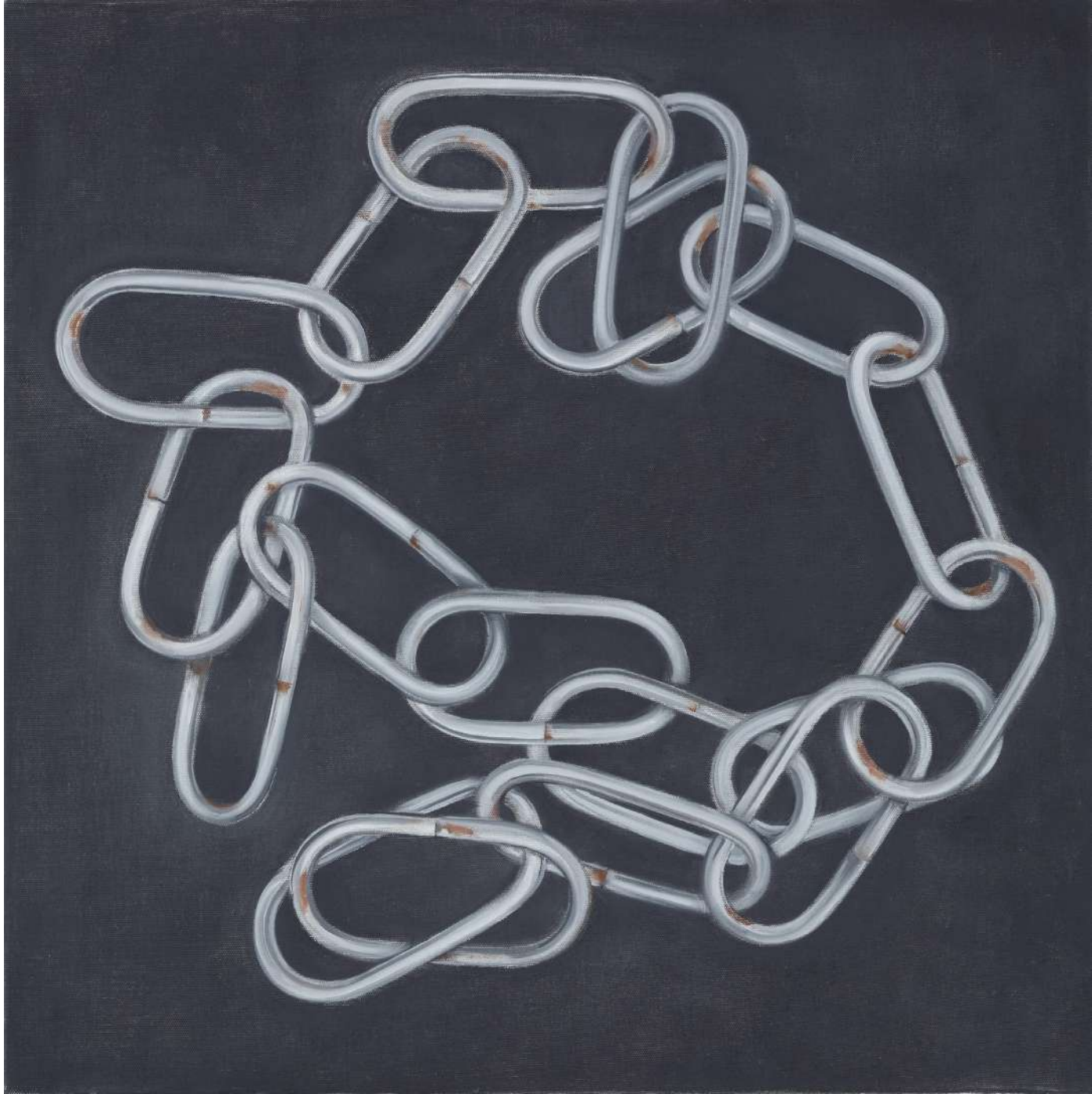






*Serpilen*, THE PILL, Istanbul, 2017.

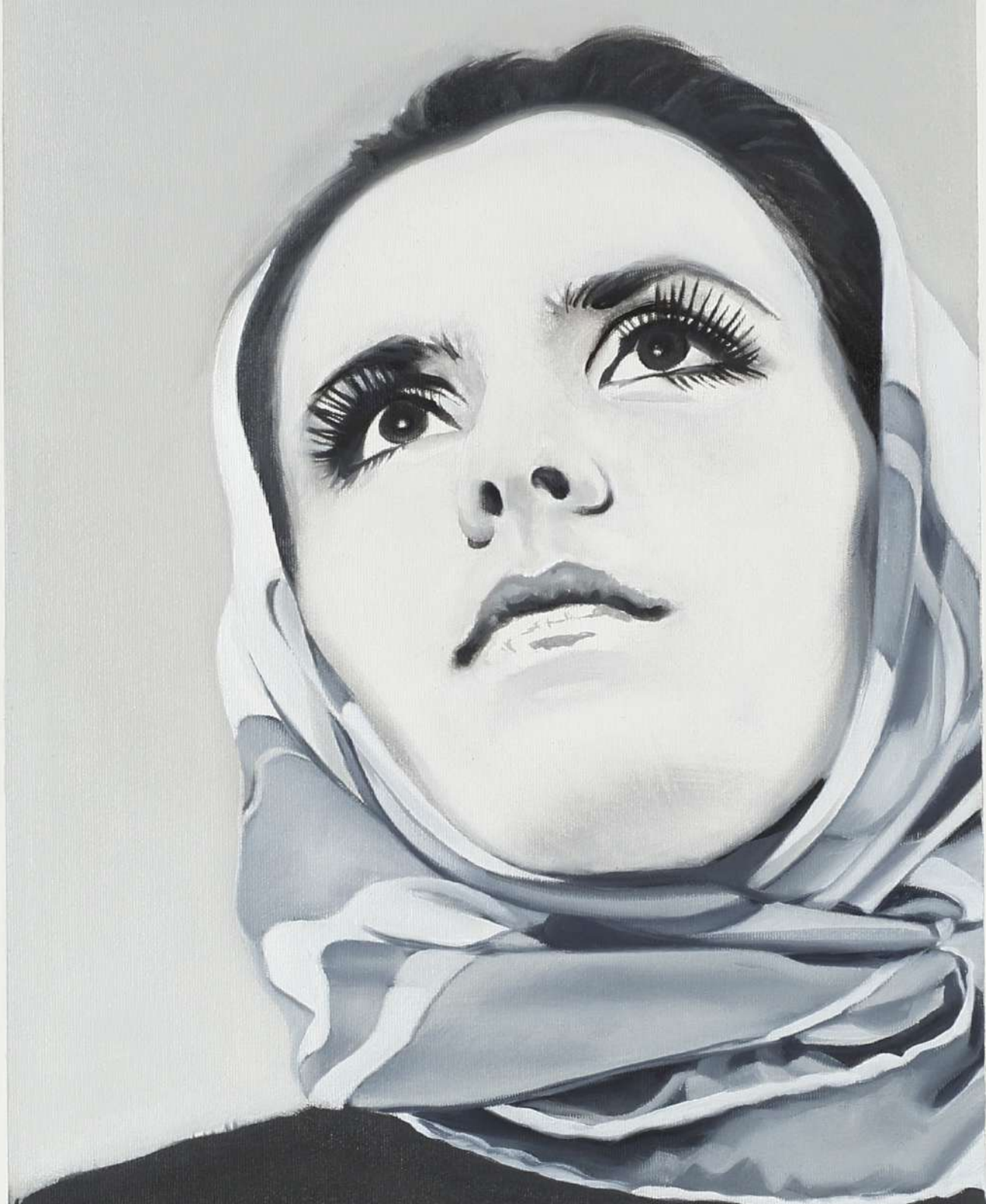




Leylâ Gediz  
19 Ocak, 2015  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 60 cm

Leylâ Gediz  
*Femme*, 2016  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 x 70 cm





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*Selected texts and press*



# Art unlimited



İKİ AYDA BİR YAYIMLANIR. PARA İLESATIMAZ, TEMMİZ AĞUSTOS 2024, SAYI 82, LEYLÂ GEDİZ, FOTOGRAF BERK KİR

**LEYLÂ GEDİZ**  
İbrahim Cansızoğlu, *Odak: Resim* kapsamında sanatçıyla pratiğine dair konuştu

**RABİH MROUÉ**  
Ayşe Draz, Beykoz Kundura'da oyunlarını sergileyen sanatçının pratiğine dair yazdı buluştu

**LEVENT DOKUZER**  
Merve Akar Akgün, Zorlu PSM Genel Müdür Yardımcısı ile güncel kültür hayatını konuştu

**MEHTAP BAYDU**  
Misal Adnan Yıldız, sanatçıyla Tarabya Kültür Akademisi'nde ürettiği işler hakkında konuştu

82 FOCUS: PAINTING



Leylâ Gediz, Photo: Berk Kır

## What makes a painting

Interview: İbrahim Cansızoğlu  
Photos: Berk Kır

İbrahim Cansızoğlu's *Focus: Painting* interview series started in the fall of 2019. Many names who continue their production only through painting or prioritize painting in their art practice were the guests of this series. With artists such as Sarkis, İnci Furni, Evren Sungur, Tunca, Gökçen Cabadan, İhsan Oturmak and Nuri Kuzucan, we discussed both their own practices and the position of painting in local and international contexts. Over time, *Focus: Painting* started to become cover stories. We continue our journey, that started with Fulya Çetin, with Leylâ Gediz, whose works can also be seen at the exhibition *Painting Today* at Yapı Kredi Culture and Arts this summer



Leylâ Gediz, Serpilen exhibition view, The Pill, Istanbul, 2017, Photo: Hasan Deniz

I remember talking to you about Lisbon when you were about to make the decision to move from Istanbul. On my first visit to Lisbon, I thought that the similarities mentioned by other Istanbul residents who went to see the city were true. The hilly streets of Lisbon overlooking the sea looked very similar to Istanbul. However, the fact that it was built on the shores of an ocean made Lisbon a very different place from Istanbul. The city had an air that was similar to Istanbul, but felt much more spacious than Istanbul. Speaking in the context of your painting, what kind of mental space did Lisbon open up for you and how did the process of being accepted in art circles in Portugal progress for you?

I remember we talked about this similarity! I told you that Istanbul and Lisbon are nothing alike! First of all, I am an Istanbul lover. Not only me, the whole world admires Istanbul! How many cities can hold a candle to Istanbul? Okay, Lisbon also faces the water, but the city doesn't work both ways. When you cross the bridge, it is a different city. Almada, a city that Lisboners don't really like and even despise a bit... An ordinary Lisboner crosses Almada only when he wants to go to the beaches along the Caparica coast. There is also maritime traffic between the two cities, but where are the city line ferries and their puffing decks? The best way to experience Istanbul in all its splendor is to take a ferry and sit outside! On the Lisbon-Almada line, there is no deck, not even a window. Do you know what I mean? The only thing that makes you think of Istanbul while living in Lisbon is seeing the river, the opposite coast and the bridge from the top of the city. Otherwise Lisbon is nothing like Istanbul. Of course Lisbon will be more spacious, the area and population speak for themselves. But there is also a third factor: light! We are already talking about one of the most sunlit cities in Europe. But the reason why Lisbon shines so brightly is the cobblestones on the ground. The twisted limestones echo like a disco ball. Imagine a light ringing and singing in the air. For a painter, a photographer or a cameraman, Lisbon is heaven!

I see everything much better in the light. I feel mentally refreshed. When I was in Turkey, there was a curtain in front of my eyes. A monotonous filter that monotonizes everything, like a prison. I had to get rid of it; otherwise my art would become rote and boring. That's why I left my country, ready to start from scratch in a place where I didn't know anyone, where I didn't even speak the language. Of course, I didn't know how hard it would be... I don't know how I endured the first three years, what I held on to. Maybe I gritted my teeth so as not to be called a "lonely failure."

I'm not someone who gives up easily anyway. But no matter how hard I tried, I had to wait four years to step on stage. The pandemic was behind us. Everyone was mobilized to revive the market, new expansions, business lines, opportunity campaigns, announcement after announcement were coming. The art world would not be left behind! One day, at a meeting of friends, I heard a call for support for artists being mentioned. One of the friends who was talking fervently stopped, turned to me and said, "Everyone is applying, you should apply too." I immediately took action. Later I heard that Margarida Mendes backed my project, she convinced the jury. Thanks to the Gulbenkian Foundation! When I received the news, I was aware that this was a milestone. For the first time, Portugal was opening its hand and giving me something. I savored this moment to the fullest, celebrated it with my circle. Everyone from friends and family got involved, the venue was found, the paintings were finished, installed, the book was prepared, interviews were organized... In other words, it was a complete exhibition.

I had spent close to two years in the studio with some of the paintings I showed, and the isolation of the pandemic allowed me to give them my full attention. So, they were very serene. I would say meditative. They were based on delicate equations, like the anatomy of fragility, and they contained metaphysical games/propositions that only the language of painting made possible. Technically, none of them were finished. Over time, this state turned into a perception of fate. They were comfortable as if they had found themselves in the ambiguity of unfinishedness. I saw that there was no point in pushing, so I finally accepted the paintings as they were and signed the backs.

In the following year, with the initiative of my gallery, I had exhibitions in Paris and London. At the end of this work, I started to receive exhibition offers from Portugal, one after the other, which I couldn't even imagine. Of course, I couldn't say no to any of them, after all, I've been waiting for this moment for years! So, inevitably, I found myself in the middle of a terrible work traffic. I got into a lot of stress. As the exhibitions opened, naturally, my visibility increased and my circle became wider, but frankly, I couldn't pay much attention to the environment in the rush to work on projects such as exhibitions and books. For example, how many exhibitions have I missed in the past months, exhibitions of artists I love and follow... This is unheard of me! In this new busy schedule, because I don't have as much time to paint as I used to, my solutions to technical problems also change, my

expectations change, I rethink about aesthetics, form, tactics, everything, I make decisions and then go back to the painting. If the painting goes back to its usual way, I have to stop and listen. Before the end of 2024, I will have new exhibitions in Istanbul and Portugal. I miss painting without fighting with myself, not with panic, but with serenity. I hope I will find the recipe!

**In 2022, at the *Cosa Mentale* exhibition you organized at L'Atlas Gallery in Paris, you exhibited your recent works on displacement and migration. I think the phrase "archaeology of emotions" in the exhibition's introductory text makes it easier to understand the networks of relationships you have established between everyday objects and still life, as well as autobiography and portraiture. Would you like to talk about the perspective of this exhibition?**

A poetic exhibition text. It likens me to an archaeologist studying "slices of everyday life" and more concretely claims that I am working on an excavation to unearth the emotions emanating from these slices. Really, kudos to whoever wrote it; isn't this Expressionism? I didn't realize I was so close to expressionism! Since my figurative expression/figure language is based on photography, I have always associated myself with the Realist movement. It's a historical mistake for someone who drifts in the whirlpool of emotions, but this self-satisfied version of Realism is absurd anyway! Anyway, the author is right! Because both still life and portrait are carriers. What they carry is important - and that is emotions. If I go further, I can also say this: Emotions are what make a painting. Going back to *Cosa Mentale*, it was an exhibition where I questioned the relationship between ground and figure. In most of my paintings, I constructed this relationship as an illusion without reality. In cases of displacement, displacement or migration, there is a landslide. Can the migrant's relationship with the land be the same as that of the ancient citizen? Isn't the landless person liberated to the extent that he or she is freed from gravity? To summarize, the relationship between the ground and the figure, which is one of the fundamental issues of painting, is as much political as it is formal. When we first met to talk about this interview, you were packing up your belongings and notes from the house you once used as a studio in Istanbul. After a long separation and moving to a new city, what did this retrospective make you think, feel and what did it trigger for you? I had embarked on quite a feverish spring cleaning, and it was a good thing! In September 2017, when we pulled the door shut and moved to Lisbon, I left behind my studio as it was. Of course, I've had some minor tidying up attempts here and there, but this time was different. It's like reformatting the computer and updating the applications. First of all, I got rid of all the unnecessary

stuff from the babyhood of our 9-year-old son, including the furniture. Don't worry, I won't actually list all the junk I've collected here, but I'll get to the point: old images. The reason I went through them was to find a favorite, award-winning painting of mine from my student years. This painting is a thin-long vertical rectangle. At the bottom of the painting there are some regular stripes that can be considered an abstract composition. Towards the middle of the painting these stripes form the outline of a wardrobe. The door of the closet is not fully closed, it is slightly ajar, but not enough to show the inside of the closet. Towards the top of the painting, one can clearly see a black suitcase lying on its side on top of the closet. Just as the lower part of the painting/the buttonholes of the closet was abstract, the top of the painting is surreal because there is a blue sky when we should see a ceiling. If the closet is a pedestal, the suitcase is a sculpture and it seems to be located in the open air, in a public space or on a metaphysical plane (like an ancient city). Anyway, we were talking about displacement, migration... My migration life started when I went to London to study at university. This is a painting of my longing for home, for my country, for the sky that surrounds my country. The suitcase is an inviting, seductive object insofar as it signals that I can pack up and leave at any moment, but it is also a cruel object insofar as it keeps feeding this impossible dream. It fascinates me that it's been 25 years since I painted it, but it hasn't lost any of its relevance and freshness!

**In *The Crab Trainer*, you depict your son Anka standing with playful curiosity among the cardboard boxes that we often see in your recent works. The references to and interrogations of Turkey's canvas painting tradition, which began in the Ottoman period and continues to the present day, contain a plurality and depth that a careful observer of your practice will be confronted with in many different dimensions. What would you like to say about the creative process of this work, which indirectly references Osman Hamdi's *Tortoise Trainer*, and the different ways in which it has been exhibited so far?**

*The Crab Trainer* was exhibited once in Vienna and appeared in the printed media. But there was something about it that didn't feel right, so when it came back from Vienna, I reworked the painting. The painting was exhibited in its renewed, final form in Paris this time and then it left my hands. I prefer to have finished a painting in my head before I start it, because then my work is easier and my mind is at peace. That's what happened with this one too. When I started working, there was no figure in the composition, our boy. I was playing with pieces of paper, cardboard and styrofoam. Play is the first and most important stage of my creative

Leyla Gediz, *The Crab Trainer*, 160 x 180 x 4,5 cm, Oil on linen, 2022 Photo: João Neves



process. At this stage I question the nature of matter. I approach the objects I choose as building blocks or theater props, and with them I experiment with all kinds of architectural, spatial, relational (aesthetic) and theatrical (narrative) possibilities (whatever my imagination allows). On one such day, I was turning over a piece of cardboard when I realized that from a certain angle it looked like a crab. As the game continued, I thought of my son. The previous week I had taken a photo of him by the sea looking at the potholes. I thought that if I replaced the pothole with a crab, the two of them would talk. It was natural that I remembered *The Tortoise Trainer*. How many paintings are there in which a human figure standing in the center observes animal figures walking on the ground? It was funny, the similarity between the misery of the tortoises and the trinkets I had made for myself. Just as *The Tortoise Trainer* can be interpreted as a self-portrait, *The Crab Trainer* is of course not simply a painting of my son Anka; it is a self-portrait in the form of Anka. And so the painting was finished in my mind and its name was given. *The Crab Trainer* brought me together with Osman Hamdi; if he were in my place, he would have looked at that crab and laughed. This is friendship, something we need like water, like air; a friend who understands our situation, who laughs with us and cries with us, even if he lived in a different era! I had such contact with Hale Asaf, Ercüment Kalmuk and Philip Guston... May their souls rest in peace!

**I know that at first you were not very warm to the habit of evaluating a painter's works within the framework of different periods in art history studies. From where you stand today, what do the concepts of period and style mean to you in the context of painting?**

Yes, I really hated this thing called style! When I think back to my twenties, of course I find myself a bit naive, but I am not totally wrong in my reaction. At the end of the day, the history of art is a cultural construction shaped by economic, political and social preferences. Like every pile, it has an overwhelming power. For example, it can exclude dark-skinned people or women for centuries. It determines what is art and what is not. As you said, looking at art production in terms of periods and style has become a habit, a tradition. These concepts may work for art historians, but for the artist, every repetition is a sanction, every concept is an imposition. If the artist produces what art history writes instead of the artist producing and writing art history, a new page will never be added to art history. The way to enter art history is paradoxical, that is, it requires thinking and producing outside art history. To summarize, none of the art historical concepts work for the artists, they only tire their jaw!

**I think only those who have visited the house you once used as a studio in Istanbul have had the chance to see some of the canvases you produced when you were still a student. In these canvases, it is possible to sense some of the approaches that would later form the basis of your painting practice, such as monumentalizing furniture and presenting the landscape in an abstract order. If you were to exhibit these early works today, how would you choose to do it?**

First of all, I want you to know that I don't show those paintings to everyone! But I couldn't get enough of looking at them with you, your observations and observations were extremely valuable for me too. As for your question, dear Emre Baykal actually gave a very good answer to this question within the scope of the *Oyanbu* exhibition he curated at ARTER in 2022. Again, on his initiative, he exhibited three paintings from my student years, which have been in the collection since 2016, in a group of their own, one above the other, in a marvelous way. I couldn't have done better. I would have exhibited them again in groups, close to each other. Maybe I would have laid one on the floor and leaned the other against the wall, just to detach it from the wall. As you have identified, it is quite easy and enjoyable to imagine those depicting furniture-like objects side by side with my current paintings due to their thematic kinship. As for landscapes... I have not painted landscapes for a long time, I wonder why? Could it be that I have forgotten the distance and lost my wide-sightedness due to focusing on the near? Should we necessarily understand the outdoors when we say landscape? Don't the exhibitions I set up constitute a mental landscape? What if a giant painting covers the entire field of vision like a theater stage, even if it has no natural motifs, is it not a landscape? I think what I would do is to place my most abstract and poetic landscapes as stops between my newly designed painting collectives, to use them as promenades.

**In 2017, in your exhibition *Serpilen at The Pill*, you had a work in which you depicted a man examining a canvas he was holding in his hand. As part of the exhibition, you also produced a poster with this work and you gave me one of them as a gift. I hung this poster on a wall in my house. That rectangular strip separating the man looking at the canvas; and the canvas, the same color as the background of the painting, had a great effect on me from the first moment I saw it. I don't remember how long I watched that image. Looking at it from today's point of view, I realize that this painting is the basis for my five-year-long *Focus: Painting* interview series. Where did you encounter the image in this work and how did you decide to paint it?**

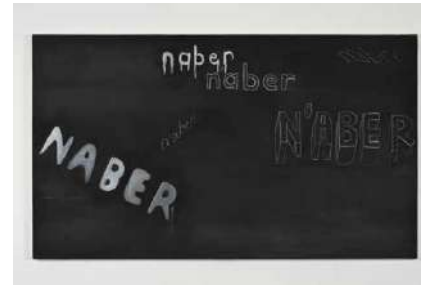
Are you serious? What a nice compliment; I'm so happy that my painting inspired you! Now it makes sense that it's my turn in the interview series! Let me put it this way; I have a large family. We read a lot and every house has a library that is always overflowing. When a house or office closes (due to the death of the landlord, a house being rented out without furniture, a workplace closing/moving), the remaining belongings are distributed. At such times, my studio is not forgotten and whatever is thought to be useful to me, is mailed to me. One day, at the door of my studio, I found 15-20 burgundy bound books, A3 sized and about 10 cm thick (you guess the weight!), lying on top of each other in columns. These were *Life* magazines that a family member had collected over the years. Although I can't remember the exact date range of the collection, let's say post-World War II. Of course, I took them all in, and then I went through each page one by one, marking the pages



Leylâ Gediz, *Mnemonic*, 170 x 100 x 4 cm, Oil on linen, 2022  
Photo: Joâo Neves

with the images that interested me. The man you are talking about was an expert. The painting he was holding was a Christian-themed, classical painting that had changed hands for the first time in many years. Unfortunately, I couldn't memorize the name of the painter, but the painting had been auctioned and appreciated in value. The man was approaching the painting with great seriousness. However, the painting I saw did not have a number, all paintings of the period resemble each other; it was impossible to detect the difference in such a small black-and-white reproduction. I thought, what can I give the man? So I replaced the painting with an abstract scribble/stain. I was amused by the idea of making his job difficult. What I didn't tell him at the time was that this image was right in the middle of the layout in the magazine, cut off in the printing and only reunited in the index. The man was on the left page and the image in his hand was on the right page. When I opened the book wide open to scan the image, this disconnect became apparent, that line you see in between. When I transferred the image to the canvas, I had two options: transfer this line or close it. It seemed more interesting to me to transfer it, because if you didn't know the story, you would surely trip over that gap and fall into it - like you did! I did it right! It is always necessary to leave something intriguing in a painting, an incompleteness, a riddle... These things trigger the viewer's imagination, give them the possibility of interpretation, open up space. In short, they involve the viewer in the painting!

**Although autobiography is always a constitutive element in your work, you manage to make paintings that are not only introverted, but on the contrary, deeply connected with the viewer. I think one of your most extraordinary works is *What's up* (2009) considering the distances between your life, painting and the viewer that you transform constantly. How did this painting come about?**



I can't believe you asked about *What's up*. I thought very few people knew or remembered that painting, let alone dwell on it. I don't remember when I exhibited *What's up*, or if I exhibited it. Where could you have seen it? Maybe on my website? If so, come to me again one day in Istanbul and I will show you the original. It is a painting I love very much. My paintings with words on them already have a special place in my heart. Do you know what is the coolest thing about writing words on a canvas with paint? Within the framework of the autonomy principle of painting, even if the world knows that you wrote the words, the painting itself seems to be speaking. I remember a similar feeling from my school years: When I was a student, there were blackboards and chalk in the classrooms. Many classes were held in the same classroom, but for some classes we had to vacate the classroom. Classes such as sports, painting and music had their own halls, and the biology and chemistry laboratories were separate. Sometimes we would leave these classes and come back to the classroom to find notes written on the chalkboard and pictures drawn in our absence. Most of the time the content was deer, that is, jokes that we all knew. But on rare occasions, what was waiting for us on the blackboard would really puzzle us, and we would be stunned and bewildered by it. I've had such attempts, I've drawn pictures on the blackboards of other classes, I've quoted song lyrics or written poems. In 2009, inspired by these times, I made a series of works with anonymous messages. *What's up* is one of them. As in the whole series, there is an uncanny in this work. The painting clings to a mold that affirms the existence of the other, that initiates a conversation by asking how you are doing, but instead of using it for its intended purpose, it toys with it. It twists and turns it, multiplies it, disguises it... In this way, a line of questioning ceases to be a means of communication and turns into a dark parody of itself. It was a period when I was playing with fire a bit, but I think the painting conveys the feeling of isolation quite well, even revitalizes it. I'm not sure if it connects with the viewer or not, to be honest, but this is how it makes me feel.

**You are among the artists of the exhibition *Painting Today*, which opened last May at YKKS. With which work are you participating in this exhibition and what would you like to say about the exhibition?**

Ah, I would like to thank dear Didem Yazıcı and dear Burcu Çimen for this beautiful initiative and Tülay Güngen for embracing us all! On the occasion of the opening of this exhibition, meeting them, their valuable technical team members, my dear artist friends and the Istanbul art audience that I have been longing for - especially in the heart of Beyoğlu... It was like a dream! Who knows how long it had been since I had participated in an exhibition of this caliber, which deals with painting as a discipline in itself and explores its different applications! Wouldn't it be nice if such exhibitions were repeated at regular intervals and became a tradition? The synergy of the crowd that flocked to YKKS on the opening day alone said it all. What should we do if not be grateful to the host institution for bringing hundreds of people together under the same roof in one of the most controversial squares of the city and hosting them generously? We should embrace these institutions and keep them alive together. Of course, there will be aspects to criticize in the selection and presentation, language and expression of the exhibition! Let's criticize, let's shape, let's make the second, the third, always better, more comprehensive, more coherent and exciting exhibitions. Because this is good for us. For my part, I tried to bring as much of my practice as possible to the exhibition. I have an installation in front of the security gate as soon as you step into the building. This work, titled *Intro II*, is a semi-permeable curtain/fly screen covering the doorway and consists of standard, one-way lined canvas strips. Camouflaging the security passage, the installation instead allows the visitor to come into contact with the canvas first. On the other hand, in this spilling, fringed form, *Intro II* is in a pleasing affinity with İlhan Koman's Mediterranean sculpture and winks at the Şadi Çalık sculpture in the square, which is also based on the repetition of sections of another material (stainless steel). You know how important these friendships are for me. Inside, of course, I am in contact with the other artworks in the exhibition. My wall is in a very public place. My curators' desire was for me to take an alternative stance as much as possible. So I covered the wall with Photoshop's infinite background and presented my paintings on this wallpaper in order to em-



Leylâ Gediz, *What's up*, Oil on canvas, 70 x 120 x 2,5 cm, Photo: Nathalie Barki

Leylâ Gediz, *Suitcase*, Enamel on canvas, Winner of Still Life Competition, The Slade School of Fine Art, London, 1996

Leylâ Gediz, *Untitled (Homage to Guston)*, 40 x 40 x 4 cm, Oil on linen, 2022





Leylâ Gediz, *Eu Estou Aqui* exhibition view,  
Curator: Isabel Carlos, 119 Marvila Studios, Lisbon, 2024

Leylâ Gediz, *Missing Cat*, 50 x 40 x 4 cm,  
Oil on linen, 2024



phasize the concern for process that underlies my work. Finally, as part of the exhibition panels, I gave a reading. In this, in memory of my beloved Komet, I performed the poems I selected from his book *Olabilir Olabilir*, published in 2007.

**From the very beginning we talked about publishing this interview in a summer issue. When we talk about summer, it is impossible not to remember the *Sahibinden Sayfeye* exhibition organized at Depo in 2014, curated by Borge Kantürk, in which you participated with an installation. Would you like to talk about the projects you will continue to work on this summer?**

In *Sahibinden Sayfeye*, I brought together two of my works. One of them was my sky series titled *Five Days in Buenos Aires*, which I painted by observing the weather during my visit to the city (*buones aires* means good weather). The second was my portable studio installation, which we positioned close to the only airy window of the Depo. As a reference to being a painter in the countryside, I had set up my painting *Butterfly*, which I was working on at the time, on a very light easel, with my tiny work table right next to it, the plastic soap box that inspired *Butterfly* on the table, the wet paint palette, a few brushes, the metal turpentine bowl and everything else. It was a complete scene and gave me the feeling that I would come back and continue painting at any moment. If you ask me where I will set up my easel this summer, I think I will spend the whole summer in Lisbon. We are currently working on a monograph with my gallery The Pill and we are planning to launch the book in September with a boutique exhibition. For reasons beyond our control, it could be October or November, it's not finalized at the moment. In mid-July, I will have a solo project titled *Tracey Leaving* at an artist initiative called *Figura Avulsas* in Lisbon and I will be doing a prose-poetry reading performance. For the new season, I have shaken hands with a gallery called *Dialogue* in Lisbon; they have given me a *carte blanche*, let's see, it's not time to concentrate on that exhibition yet, but I will continue the way I started this year, that is, they will all be projects where I will work on painting and writing together. This is what excites me the most right now: the dance of painting and poetry! 🐾

## *Upcycled Packaging, Frozen Screens and Halted Signifiers: a zoom Studio-Visit with Leylâ Gediz.*

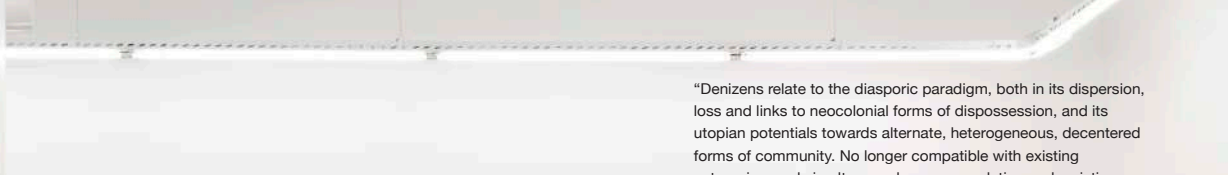


VIEW OF THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

“To try and present something that may traditionally be seen as unfinished is my greatest challenge. Most of the time, painting is conceived as a polished, finalized product to be shown and sold, whereas I would much rather define it as a performance, an ongoing activity, a profession, and an act of labor. This is why I am so passionate about presenting the backstage—or, as we say in Turkish, the ‘kitchen’—of painting.

Behind me, you can see a painting I am working on. It is of my son. In the studio, I emptied the space to create a set. I rolled out an empty sheet of canvas, and on it, I placed some Styrofoam packaging that one would throw away. To me, upcycling those objects through the act of painting is an anticapitalistic gesture. In our lives, there is a constant cycle of the rubbish we create and the objects we discard; and in my practice, I am interested in that which normally does not get evaluated. When objects do not have a clear function, they possess an ambiguity I try to convey by a simple, illustrative brushstroke.

Here is a painting of boxes. The source image is taken from a product catalogue, but what purpose does a box serve when there is nothing in it? In a sense, it becomes like a bird in the sky: a metaphor for space. My work is akin to thinking and writing in words. It is also closely linked to a conceptual questioning: What is the relevance of an object? If you don't accept the meaning attributed to a thing, then you can use them in new ways to tell a story—your own, or whichever you would like.”

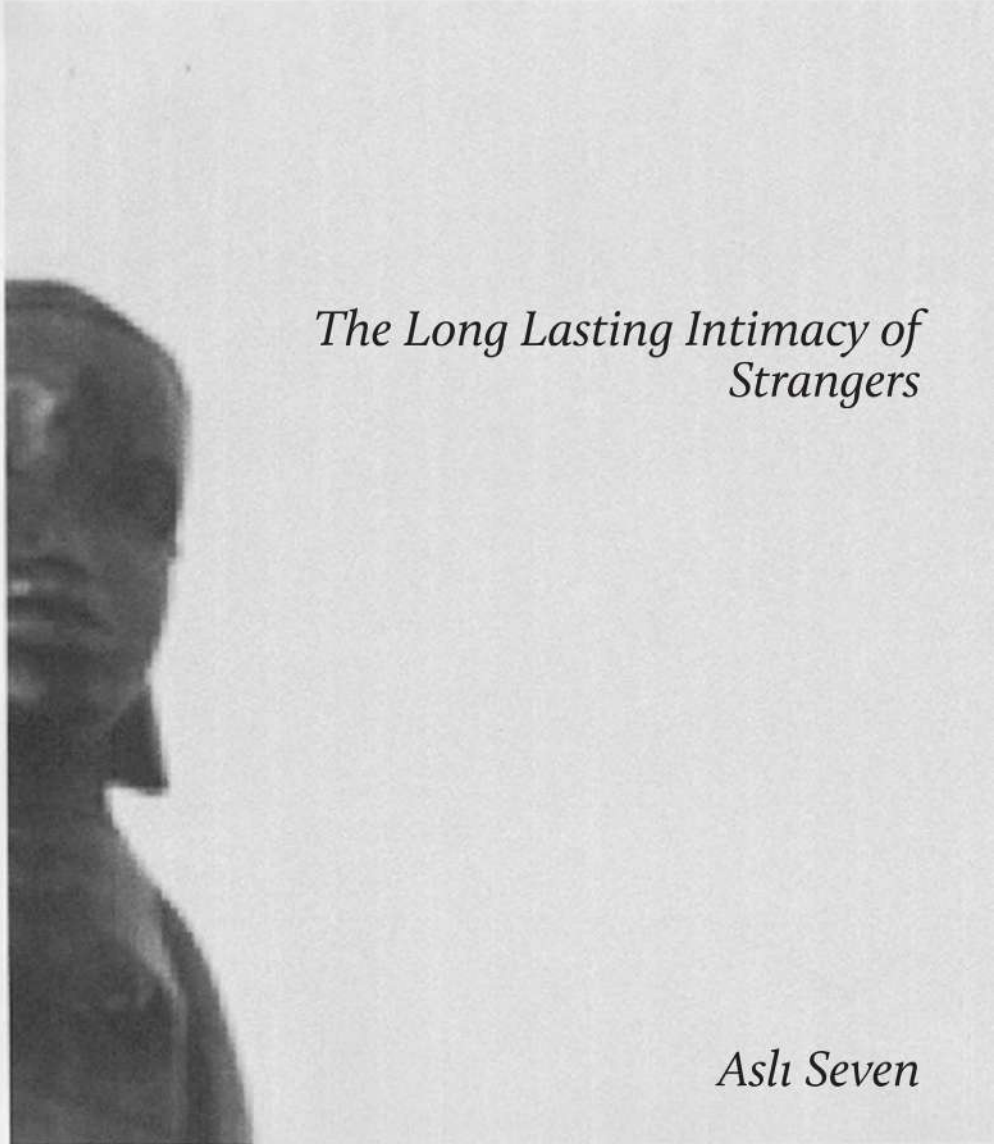


“Denizens relate to the diasporic paradigm, both in its dispersion, loss and links to neocolonial forms of dispossession, and its utopian potentials towards alternate, heterogeneous, decentered forms of community. No longer compatible with existing categories, and simultaneously accommodating and resisting assimilation, diasporic being is burdened with invention.

In Leylâ’s composition however, diasporic being reaches far beyond the legal and political duality of citizen/denizen, to suggest a level playing field between objects and images, support structures and paintings, tool-beings and people. And the term “denizen” expands from the most bureaucratic sense to the realm of aesthetics.

Leylâ’s *Denizens* is about recomposing the world from the standpoint of what is usually held off the frame, in a painting or an image or in an exhibition, with attention directed towards what constitutes the support of painting as practice, maintained in displacement. It is about defining a place through the margins, taking as point of departure diasporic and nomadic realities carried by bodies, people, images, objects and tools alike, while bringing the frame, the mold and the software themselves to the center of focus.”

EXTRACT FROM *THE LONG-LASTING INTIMACY OF STRANGERS*, ASLI SEVEN, 2019  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE EXHIBITION *DENIZENS*,  
LEYLÂ GEDİZ, *THE PILL*, 2019



*The Long Lasting Intimacy of Strangers*

*Aslı Seven*

*The Long Lasting Intimacy of Strangers*

April 2018, Leylâ Gediz composed an exhibition titled "Anagram" at a small artist run space, an apartment-turned-gallery in Istanbul. It was composed of

A video, a montage of found footage and archival images, black and white. Accompanied by a well-known Turkish song of the 1970s titled "Do Not Forget Me", the footage itself was fragmented against the grey-white grid of cubes, the background of the image editing software. The abstract grid of pixels grew and shrank, the found footage of a nostalgic past receded against the expanding, perforating grid, and then grew again asserting itself as a moving image against this background, and so on. The figure of the African-Turkish singer-songwriter Esmeray was present throughout the video, only through its absence, its traces on archival photographs; her body either blurred, or shadowed by its negative space, delineated by the software's background image.

Installations made with brown and white sugar cubes, most of which were placed on the windows like screens. Windows became the pixelated image support; they also projected the grid in shadow across the walls and floors with the sunlight coming in.

The painting of a sculpture depicting an African woman, a found sculpture, an item left behind by the previous tenants of the house Leylâ had just moved into in Lisbon. I remember video images she shot carrying the sculpture in her hand against the backdrop of the cobblestone grid of Lisbon's streets.

I understood Anagram as an expression of Leylâ's recent displacement. She had taken herself and her family, parted with her hometown Istanbul and moved to Lisbon eight months prior to that exhibition.

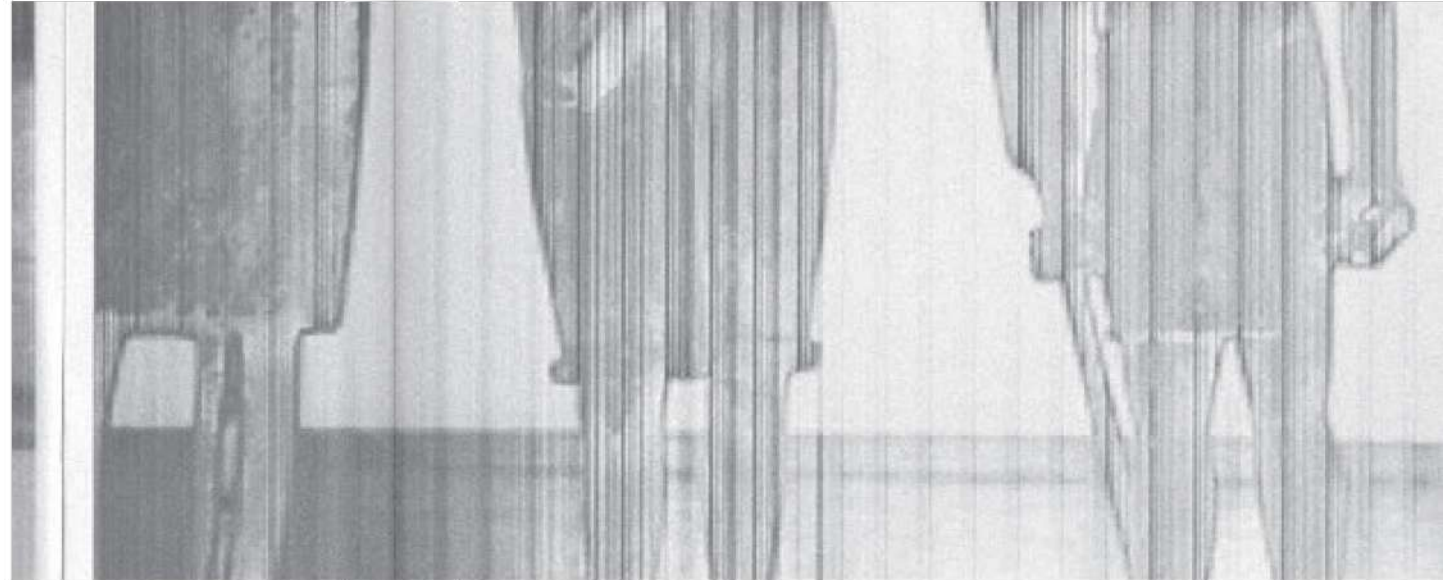
In the three paintings based on the found sculpture - *Obscura, Encounter I* and *Encounter II* - and also in some frames of the video *Parabéns*, Leylâ's hand is part of the frame: how to hold this connection, now? Which corner to grasp it from, which perspective to see this through?<sup>1</sup>  
*What tune am I singing now?*

Displacement induces an uncertainty into the background/figure relationship sustaining one's life and sense of self. This default relationship, constitutive of subjectivity, dissolves in displacement. You move into a new city, a new country, a new context and, for some time, you lose your sense of subjecthood. You become disconnected from your usual background and for a while, you are devoid of any supporting backdrop or reserve against which you can build and compose yourself as a subject. It's as if the surrounding place and objects become subjects and you become an object being moved within their setting.

*Parabéns* carried a suspension. When you can no longer represent or perform your subjectivity - self as a figure - you feel yourself as an object. There is a momentary loss of affect, of the capacity to affect and to be affected. Hence the shout out, "Do not forget me", but we know that the forgetting is already in place. It's a tune that is played over and again, knowing that you are losing something, embracing it goodbye. I remember thinking in front of the video that composing this exhibition might have been Leylâ's way back to composing herself as a figure. An attempt at a momentary recomposition.

<sup>1</sup> *Encounter I* was part of "Anagram", OJ Art Space, Istanbul, 07-29 April 2018, while *Obscura* and *Encounter II* were displayed as part of "Parabéns", Akinci, Amsterdam, 24 November 2017 - 13 January 2018.

What is the value of reading / writing an exhibition along this kind of biographical process? What is lost when we evacuate process and biography in the name of an evaluation that analyzes and classifies? *Registering the plasticity of material in autobiographical terms*. Subjectivity is always there as the matter of work, to be worked, concealed or recovered in form. Form and process are like visibility (*le mur blanc de la signifiante*) and shadows (*le trou noir de la subjectivation*). What is visible or sayable at any given time and place always exists against the reserve of all that is unsaid and unseen - the public secret, the fault line that runs through us and splits us. How do we sing and dance across the fault line? Displacement does not necessarily occur through change of place. You can stand still at the same place and be displaced by the sudden erection of a wall or a regime change, or by a highway that runs through the land plot where your backyard used to be. *This is not my beautiful house; this is not my beautiful wife*. When the ground upon which you are accustomed to stand and to compose yourself as a figure is lost, the fault line that defines the realm of the sayable and the visible loses its certainty, in blurring, it reveals itself and as such, it slides into focus. A defamiliarization occurs, a strange strangeness. If suspended long enough in that transitory moment, we might perceive something - ourselves included - for the first time.





September 2019, the exhibition "Denizens" at The Pill seems to hold the answer to the question of how displacement, as an "epoche", reflects back on the notions of place and community, placement and place-making, the setting of an unstable place, the settling and unsettling of a community across multiple places.

Coined in the mid-19th century in response to the growing international circulation of people and objects, the term denizen described a new kind of non-essentialist belonging that was independent of "natural" roots in the form of blood and/or birth right, to designate people and beings that belonged by simply living, inhabiting or frequenting a particular place:

A living being that has adapted to a milieu and became constitutive of it.  
A regular at a bar.  
A non-native species.  
An assimilated barbarian.  
A foreigner allowed certain rights (but not all rights) in their adopted country.  
A legal alien.  
An unfamiliar familiar.  
Intimate strangers.

*Becoming an object of bureaucracy, like those polystyrene supports of packaging, in search of a category to fit in: refugee, migrant, expatriate, none of the above. How to dance and sing between a rock and a hard place?*

More accurately and in legal terms, denizen designates a transitional state between "alien" and "natural born subject", and projects into the world all the non-conformist, transitory and shifting modes of existence in relation to place, and positions itself in tension with the other, conventional and central term of the political citizen, putting into question and shaking the grounds of the sedentary habitus. Denizens relate to the diasporic paradigm, both in its dispersion, loss and links to neocolonial forms of dispossession, and its utopian potentials towards alternate, heterogeneous, decentered forms of community. No longer compatible with existing categories, and simultaneously accommodating and resisting assimilation, diasporic being is burdened with invention.

In Leylá's composition however, diasporic-being reaches far beyond the legal and political duality of citizen/denizen, to suggest a level playing field between objects and images, support structures and paintings, tool-beings and people. And the term "denizen" expands from the most bureaucratic sense to the realm of aesthetics.

Leylá's "Denizens" is about recomposing the world from the standpoint of what is usually held off the frame, in a painting or an image or in an exhibition, with attention directed towards what constitutes the support of painting as practice, maintained in displacement. It is about defining a place through the margins, taking as point of departure diasporic and nomadic realities carried by bodies, people, images, objects and tools alike, while bringing the frame, the mold and the software themselves to the center of focus.

A personal ethnography of the infinitesimal infrastructure that shapes and defines the possibility of a *diasporic painting* ensues, and reveals the ethnographer-surrealist in Leylá - "*Surrealism is like water*" - tangled up in writing, composing and figuring herself through: logistics of transportation, moving in, moving out, carrying a canvas on a plane, the cardboard water glasses of Portuguese Airlines ornamented with the Lisbon cobblestone, stretcher bars of a canvas, the undercarriage of a bed, the undercarriage of a bathtub, the texture of canvas, the bed base (not the bed, but the base), Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF), the IKEA world of cardboard packaging, the understated value of compatibility, cardboard separators inside cardboard boxes, cardboard protectors of canvas corners, a drawing folder with shifting affective states and mobile phone charger cables we are increasingly dependent upon. All these "things" created to be compatible as supports, to fit with one thing, and one thing only, achieve

full ontological status when freed from their subordinate position to the objects they were made to support, and gaze back at us as embodiments of a newfound incompatibility. They become closer and distant at the same time. They are the incompatible inhabitants, the unfit denizens – no longer useful and freed from their subordinate function; they emit animacy and agency through their “thingness”.

In Leylâ's compositions these support structures and carriers are not only the main figures depicted on canvas alongside people, objects and scenes, they are also displayed as installations. *Denizens* emphasizes the grid and the wooden stretcher as material conditions of possibility of a canvas, of painting. The ground is thus brought to the fore, as “painting” recedes partially to the background; they are stretched together on the same plane. *Unhappy Folder*, a carrier of works on paper, hangs – almost swinging, and blinking to its oblique sister, *Happy Folder* – from the wooden grid the undercarriage of a bathtub provides.

In *Erkete*, we see the corner of a street, a makeshift neighborhood in the composition of superimposed cardboard boxes of oil paints and canvases that rest haphazardly on one another's surfaces like building blocks in a shantytown, or an improvised barricade. The painting conveys simultaneously a sense of place and of displacement, and almost literally emits an installation in transitional state between an inversed IKEA bed base and Venetian blinds that condense the color spectrum of the entire exhibition. *Erkete* reflects one of the central threads underlying the exhibition. A bed, by definition, is the elementary space of the human body, in horizontal form. It is the space of surrender and sleep, of intimacy and vulnerability; but here, it is unnaturalized, in vertical standing, as if prepared for movement, turned into a barricade or a shelter – “a place from which to keep watch or view the landscape” while remaining unseen. *Erkete* means lookout. It is a Turkish word from Greek origin that describes the watch kept, against getting caught in crime or being exposed. It is nervous and uneasy. *It has something to hide - or thinks it does.* Yersiz-yurtsuzlaşma ile köksüz bir yerini bulma arasındaki her yatış bir erketeye yatıştır.

By recalibrating the focus away from the centrality of painting towards the formal and material language of the support, of sustaining textures and stretchers, Leylâ partially erodes painting's conventional authority and uniqueness. As multiples and variations abound, and as canvases lodge and dislodge themselves in installations and as fragments, an interplay of place and displacement, of presence and absence, of exploration and remembrance unfolds. “*I am made of a thousand pieces.*”

We are presented with variations on a theme in the twin paintings *In The Field II* and *In The Field III*: a gathering between four figures around a support structure – a railing – to be installed. The railing, a supporting

structure here decontextualized and framed as the place-maker, draws its full performative potential in shaping a gathering around its twist and asserting itself as an active member of the temporary community engaged in searching for its place.<sup>2</sup> Composing a scene again and again is like playing a song over and over in loop because it affected you so much, to hold on to that feeling of having discovered something for the first time, with the joy and excitement of trying to but not yet being able to fully grasp it – *unfinished, because completion would mean outgrowth, and why would anyone listen to a song they've outgrown?* The two paintings create a magnetic field that expands in time and space, through two other works: *Alegoria*, where we see four figures again, moving and gathering around a wooden stick, but yellow-washed and removed in time and space, these are children playing on a beach – or are they alternate versions of the railing-gatherers? In the opposite direction in time and space stands *In The Field I*, through its absence, and opens the ground of the collaboration between Leylâ Gediz and Deniz Pasha, a performance to come inside the exhibition.

“*Denizens*” operates like a music record, an ensemble of tracks, samples, remakes and variations that interact with one another and create a force field between them to navigate, and yet the objects and scenes from which these tunes emanate remain withdrawn, removed. History is here.

<sup>2</sup> In choosing to paint this scene, Leylâ draws multiple references embracing one another. The scene actually depicts the process of installation of a railing model originally designed by Swedish architect Sigurd Lewerentz, and reinterpreted by Mike Cooter for a collaborative exhibition with Tomás Cunha Ferreira in the Azores Islands. There is a line between this referential embrace, and the one depicted in *Umarmung*, a couple walking in the streets of Lisbon – a memory from her first visit to the city a decade earlier – also embodied in a second canvas embracing the one holding the painting.

There is a thread that runs through “Parabéns”, “Anagram” and “Denizens”, which started with the abandoned wooden sculpture Leylâ found in her new home in Lisbon, depicting an African woman. This thread that led to her collaboration with Esmeray, an Afro-Turk, unfolds now in *Taliswoman* and *Sleeping Beauty*, and gives way to her collaboration with Deniz Pasha.

From the woven and stretched texture of the canvas, we transition to the multifarious textures of a world fabric weaved by the threads of colonial and neocolonial violence, through all the ways in which Leylâ engages in a dialogue with African diaspora and artefacts, in *Istanbul via Lisbon*. From the Black Atlantic to the Black Mediterranean, denizens are *denizdenler*, from the sea, caught up in the passage of the sea, the space of movement, gathering and dispersion.<sup>3</sup>

We speak of the unsayability of what she's saying, the fault line of who owns the pain, and yet, who can pretend not to be affected by it. “*The bloody catalog of oppression*”. Where do we stand in this history of extraction of human bodies, cultures and land by dispossession? What happens to us when we become displaced – stripped from the illusion of identity, some things you can only see in dispossession, and you're forever altered. Can we preserve the illusion of purity, in dispersion, as the diaspora we've become, is there any truth to purity, about us or about these histories we are now entering in? In the process of writing this, I keep remembering Fred Wilson's *Afro Kismet*, and the face of Kuzgun Acar appears and reappears in my mind.<sup>4</sup> Have we been kept outside of History? For how long have we refused to recognize this other in ourselves? What does “decolonization” mean to us, here and now? A blindspot in

<sup>3</sup> “Black Atlantic” refers to the title of Paul Gilroy's seminal work, and the more recent term of “Black Mediterranean”, to Alessandra Di Maio. Both studies attempt at opening to the multiplicity of African diaspora as caught up in the passage of the sea as the founding moment – it is not in an African “home” nor through citizenship rights and integration, but in the very moment of passage through the sea that the African diaspora appears in its full historical and epistemological potential.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Wilson's *Afro Kismet* was an installation focusing on the depiction of African figures in paintings from the Orientalist collection of Pera Museum, 15th Istanbul Biennial, 2017. Kuzgun Acar (1928-1976) was a leading figure in Modern Turkish sculpture of Libyan origin on his mother's side.

the peripheral vision of the last European Empire (the qualification itself being a ground of contestation), itself stretched like a canvas between the continental margins of all the old and new World peripheries, now entering its final phase of dispossession.

Entering an uncharted territory, to the question of how diasporic being affects one's sense of place and belonging, one's consciousness of history and one's place within it, Leylâ answers by bringing it home. Mining her history – our history – of African bodies and artefacts, comes another move off the frame, an attempt at resuscitation. The ornamental African figurines depicted in *Taliswoman* and *Sleeping Beauty* both come from her family home in Istanbul where she grew up. *Taliswoman* carries the formal language of a search for the right distance – again, how to touch this, how to handle this, which corner to hold it from? – a photograph inversed to its negative, blown up and fragmented into a grid of A4 printouts, some of which appear partially erased by digital glitch, against the blank whiteness of half the canvas. The painting conveys a signal loss, an error in transmission, and simultaneously restitutes these objects in their unfamiliarity, or rather, their opacity. This is a painting, not of the figurines, but of the multiple layers of remove that lie between us and these objects, between these objects and their painterly depiction and as such, it reveals these artefacts in their *right not to be seen*.<sup>5</sup>

Through these gestures of remove, of searching for the right distance, these objects appear to us as animate beings. Instead of being locked in a “botany of death”<sup>6</sup>, they speak and compose and sing side by side with all the denizens Leylâ brings together in this exhibition as a gathering of intimate strangers that, maybe, belong not to a fixed territory, identity, race or class, but only to each other in their incompatibility and their resistance to *naturalization*.

<sup>5</sup> For the right to opacity as the right not to be seen, and also the links between violence and ‘distancing’, see Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, University of Michigan Press, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> This quote is from Chris Marker, Alain Resnais & Ghislain Coquet's 1953 film “Statues Also Die” on African Art under colonial gaze: “When men die, they enter into history. When statues die, they enter into art. This botany of death is what we call culture.”



A creolisation between Portuguese and the Arabic inshallah, Oxalá has a sensual twist in the sound world of Turkish, as if it was a command to touch: Okşa, Caress. In this transitional and translational space of multiple languages we inhabit, I hear it as an embrace of uncertainty, of not knowing, of trusting and becoming with the flows of things, but conditioned on touching – on letting your body enter into contact with realities and bodies that are “other” – a kind of touching from a distance, of touching the distance itself. Which is what Leylâ attempts at, touching and being touched by History and the present of diasporic being, wayfaring through a texture of the World full of violence, hope, pain and joy.

*\*This text relies on conversations with Leylâ Gediz, Jacques Ranciere, Martin Heidegger, Donna Haraway, Lynn Margulis, Timothy Morton, Luca Guadagnino, James Clifford, Edouard Glissant, Bruno Latour, Deleuze and Guattari, Tim Ingold and many others.*

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Since 2016 she is a member of the doctoral program "Document and  
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Since 2015 she curated solo and group shows at Arter, Pi Artworks and  
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**Leylâ Gediz** was born in Istanbul in 1974. She lives and works in Lisbon  
where she relocated two years ago.

She completed her MA in Visual Arts at Goldsmiths College (London)  
and a BA in Fine Art (Painting) at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL  
(London). She has had solo exhibitions in Istanbul, Los Angeles, Zurich,  
Helsinki and Amsterdam.

Gediz occupies an important place in Turkey for her groundbreaking  
research on painting as a contemporary practice. Her work has been  
widely exhibited and is included in prestigious public and private col-  
lections, such as Istanbul Modern, Arter (Istanbul), ARCO Foundation  
(Spain) and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven).

Gediz is married and has a son.

**Deniz Pasha** is an artist currently based in Istanbul. She graduated  
from Chelsea School of Art and Design (London). Her painting practice  
revolves around themes of otherness and diasporic existence based on  
her experience living between the United Kingdom, Turkey and the  
United Arab Emirates. Her work draws from post-colonial literature,  
African philosophy, political theory and Afro-surrealism. Photography  
and journaling are integral to her practice.

She has, among other exhibitions, participated in 'Flesh and Bone', cura-  
ted by Kevser Güler at Operation Room (Istanbul), 'Dancing into One',  
curated by Ezgi Yıldız for Martch Art Project at Yoakim Greek Girls' High  
School (Istanbul), and 'Ohne' at Mekan 68 (Vienna).

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# DENIZENS

## *Leylâ Gediz*

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