

Very Contemporary! A solo exhibition by Ardan Özmenoğlu

Curated by Katerina Valdivia Bruch

If I have to talk about the work of Ardan Özmenoğlu, I will need to go back in time and check what has been happening in the formation of Turkey since the Otoman Empire until today. A lot has been changed during that time towards the development of the Turkish nation and I am not able to summarize it in this paper. What I am able to do is to connect Ardan's work in relation to Turkish contemporary art.

For this exhibition, the artist recreates in silk screen prints historical images of sultans, undercover behind x-rays. We might not be able to see the sultan, but we know that the image depicts one. Commonly used in medicine for research and diagnostics, the x-rays are literally 'scanning' the sultans to see what is behind in the interior of their bodies. X-rays make people look the same, thus we all become anonymous. What happens today if we put a big head-dress on our head? Do we also become a sultan? This question remains open as dresses do not necessarily make people play a major role in society.

Another silk screen print shows a portrait of the first president of Turkey and popular icon Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, with an enlarged background inscription *Don't forget me*, formerly Atatürk's hand-written phrase. Best known for his efforts towards the modernisation of Turkey as a democratic and secular nation-state, Atatürk was aware of the importance of literacy and education for all Turkish inhabitants. During his administration, he introduced the new Turkish Latin based alphabet that replaced the Arabic script. He was influenced by Dewey's teaching methods and gave more space to women in public matters, such as politics and education. As a result of secularisation, he abolished the use of the veil. He was also influencing the arts scene by creating in 1927 the first state art and sculpture museum, against Muslim tradition of avoiding idolatry, but corresponding to his idea of a secular state. Atatürk considered that art production, either traditional or modern creations, belong to the Turkish heritage and therefore had to be shown. Ardan reminds us of his achievements that are related to her own body of work. The artist studied at the Bilkent University in Ankara, got an English and Turkish diploma, that she is selling to the public as a result of her own survey about the state of contemporary art in Turkey. She does not need a diploma to become an artist, as the artist resides inside her. She prefers to work with prints and installations, rather than doing paintings.

Ardan moves out from the institutional work as a graduated artist, does street walks and observes a space full of meanings. She takes phrases written on walls, such as *God knows*, or phrases on crinkled papers posted on doors with adhesive foil that tell us to wait, *I went to Friday pray, I will come back soon*, or a simple phrase such as *Do not put trash here*. These phrases remind us of a social behaviour, of a living city with a religion and certain civic manners, that the artist recovers and writes on neon light tubes to express the importance of common life and of personal beliefs. But, what is contemporary here? The fact that painting and sculpture are still playing a major role in contemporary art in Turkey makes Ardan think about institutions and how art is being taught. The works *Oil on canvas* and *Ink on paper* are the clues to understand this exhibition. These two works are making a parody of the tradition of teaching art techniques in university: the artist literally exhibits oil on canvas and ink on paper, and that conceptualisation of the method is what we might call *Very Contemporary!*

Very Contemporary! A solo exhibition by Ardan Özmenoğlu
Curated by Katerina Valdivia Bruch

Opening: April 7th, 2011 at 7 pm
Exhibition: April 8th – May 4th, 2011

Macka Modern Art Gallery
Macka Caddesi 24/1
Tevsikiye, Istanbul
Turkey
www.mackamodern.com