

Nilbar Güreş – Duygu Ula Interview

DU: A lot of your work brings together queerness and domesticity /domestic spaces. Why was it important for you to bring queerness and domesticity together?

NG: There is a series that I explore this exact topic titled *Unknown Sports*. The artist statement reads:

Unknown Sports

When we feed each other fancy cakes on the slippery satin sofas or want to taste the aunt's breast milk who has freshly delivered, there is something queer to it. Also, in cleaning, in being a slave there is big potential for a sports career. We could have been high jumpers instead of mop window cleaners, sprinters instead of shop runners, shot-putting instead of holding our siblings in our arms.

There are sports and sports arenas you don't know of. The living room holds the possibility of suddenly turning into a hippodrome, the bedroom may unexpectedly become a fighting ring...

Nilbar Güres / February, 2008

The indoors are utilized more often by women and the majority of women's socializing takes place in homes. There can be many reasons for this. Gender discrimination stemming from religion and tradition that determines who can be comfortable in a public space, the way men claim the streets as their space to socialize, the way they mark those spaces as theirs... Women's physical movements in public spaces are limited. Leaving metaphors aside, women, LGBTIQA or minority-friendly neighborhoods are often very distinct areas of the city. And on top of that, there are some acts that traditionally take place in the home. Home is where they get together for collaborative or mutual aid work. To me, individuals are always more experimental and open to discovery when they are indoors.

This is why homes have a great queer potential, and it works the other way too. Even if it's not a home, when queers open a lesbian café, for instance, I see them decorating the café like their own domestic space. A lace tablecloth from somewhere, a favorite toy from childhood years, a couple posters from teenage years with poster putty still on them, colorful new year's lights, all come out of their old boxes from underneath the bed and they adapt to that queer space that is created with so much solidarity and collective effort. The space becomes personal and warm; and in my view, it becomes domesticized.

DU: If I'm not mistaken, you've been using parts of your own dowry in creating some of your installations (How I Met Your Mom, The Rose of Sapatão, the newer works in Sour As a Lemon etc.). What does that act of bringing in your own domestic objects mean to you?

NG: Maybe I need to split my dowry up into two groups; one is the archaeological one, the one assembled without my knowledge, the one I find as I trace my steps back and dig; the other is the one I have accumulated for my art, or the one that consists of pieces gifted to me by women who know about my art, the contemporary dowry that I am in control of.

Just as the dowries and childhood knickknacks of women who open queer bars transform into something else when they are placed by the register or on the walls of the space, my dowry too becomes something else – a work of art for instance. People shape their lives by transforming the contexts they are both into.

DU: In a number of your works (How I Met Your Mom, The Rose of Sapatão for instance), you're working with multiple cultural referents (Turkish, Brazilian, queer, Muslim, Christian). What is appealing to you about that blending of various cultural/identity symbols?

NG: With respect to my works The Rose of Sapatão and How I Met Your Mom; Brazil is number one in terms of density of trans* individuals in the world, Turkey is second. These are two opposite ends of the world, and Turkey is represented as a Muslim country in the world. Even though they contain a wide range of cultural referents, these works aim to highlight the similarities of these two cultures in terms of severe imposition of heteronormativity in public, and ignorant and silent attitudes towards LGBTQIA murders.

I'm not interested in erasing cultural specificity or creating a new art wave without a background. Because when you do that, you lose a lot of interesting or surprising things from that culture that might lend meaning to your life. Instead of creating a new culture and history from scratch, stretching the meanings and extents of the existing cultures can yield surprising new results. Plus, I'm not inspired by objects that don't say something – they don't remind me of anything.

DU: At times you produce your artwork in multiple modalities (How I Met Your Mom installation & drawing, Unknown Sports photos & drawings, the two trans/nonbinary figures in Sour as a Lemon, I think there's a version that's made with wire, another in cloth. What is your thought process behind these duplications or re-creations?

NG: The way that art has been shaped by political news stories over the past few years, makes me feel like art has become a digital dictionary without pages, with a form, a scent or a weight to it. The eponymous main figure from my most recent exhibition 'Sour as a Lemon' is a self-portrait in sculpture form. When I look back on it now, I realize that this work evolved as a subconscious reaction. All of the sociopolitical events that are taking place are read so broadly and globally; that this imposition to read, to follow and to react, makes us forget that our own individual stance in life, in fact can shape the whole world. Yes, just as in my most recent

sculptures, on the outside we are soft and participatory, empathetic, online activists, but on the inside, we are all made of iron.

Interview conducted via email on August 30, 2021. Translated to English by Duygu Ula.