

Open Phone Booth

Produced over four years, *Open Phone Booth* (2007-2011) was inspired by visits to the East Anatolian village where Nilbar Güreş's father grew up. The artist recalls arriving at the village, and of its clear, if unacknowledged, cultural and ethnic topography: "I get out of the airport taxi and I knew I am in another place even though it is not designated as such. The language was Kurdish, songs on the street were Kurdish, people talked to each other Kurdish, I was the tourist there." The separation of Kurdish life in Turkey is evoked vividly in her comments, as is her sensitive relationship to her community of origin. The role of the artist-as-tourist, as a visitor in a country within country, as a person who both belongs and is, simultaneously, set apart, permeates the photographs that constitute the *Open Phone Booth*.

Alternating between candid, intimate portraits, panoramic vistas, and fictionalized interventions into the landscape, the series depicts stark lack of infrastructure – from irrigation to telecommunications – that structures local life there. In *Cemile is Calling* (2011), a large-scale photograph depicts an undulating expanse of verdant, low hills interrupted by the figure of a woman who crouches in the forefront of the frame: perched on a craggy, moss-covered rock, she is turned away from the natural beauty and tuned into a conversation on her cell phone. She listens intently, rubbing her fingers together, as if sparking a fire. The tension between local scenery and global communication appears both utterly normal and yet, at the same time, the way the woman seems to flatly ignore the sweeping landscape around her subtly evokes a disconnect between a natural infrastructure, and a networked one. In *Haydar and His Friends* (2011), it is winter, the trees are barren, the hills are snow-covered, and a man stoops his head as he taps out a text message, while a friend reclines nearby. Picture after picture of solitary figure holding their digital device in a high place makes the viewer realize the locales are not chosen for their scenery, but rather because they're the Wi-Fi zones, which are few and far between.

In *Still Life-I* (2011), tin buckets appear on either side of a frozen stream with a cord strewn between them – the artist's erection of a faux irrigation system, a protest, demand and wry joke in one. In *Telecommunication-2* (2011), the artist has sunk an old, disconnected phone into the snow; with the head disengaged, it appears as if it's an open phone line, a metaphor for the line of socio-economic translation that Güreş is carving out.

- Lauren Cornell