

Nilbar Güres

Contemporary Istanbul took place a few weeks ago. Nilbar Gures was exhibited there at the stand of the New York C24 gallery.

Nilbar Güres is a Turkish artist, born in 1977 in Istanbul. She first studied art in Istanbul then in Vienna where she passed an MA at the Academy of Fine Arts. She moved to New York City in 2011. Today, she lives between Vienna and Istanbul.

She questions the construction of gender in patriarchal cultures in a multidisciplinary work: videos, photographs, installations, collages... She uses her own experience to show what is hidden, to point out the contradictions of rigid traditions.



Interview.

What is your artistic career history ? How did you come to art ?

I remember being three years old, listening to classical music and trying to dance ballet. Although I was very talented in music, I didn't receive the proper attention from my parents for me to have studied it further. When I was fifteen, I won a local award for one of my paintings created for Atatürk, the founder of Turkish National Teacher's Day. I passed the university exam a few years later for Industrial Design, as well as Painting, at the Mimar Sinan Academy of Fine Arts. After starting my study in Design, I realized I was missing the freedom and spirit of art in my life, so I changed course and began studying painting at Marmara University. My strong visual memory developed as a small child, constantly observing the things around me, like furniture and other objects, and developing their forms into something different, like animals, children, figures, etc. As an outsider, it didn't make sense for me to play with other kids, I was mostly just day dreaming by myself — probably difficult to understand and to handle for my parents.

Livia Perrier: Nilbar Güres, Interview

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<http://www.young-art-review.fr/review/nilbar-gures6242032#> (08.11.2018)

How feminist issues are resonating with your work ? Has it always been an underlying issue in your work ?

I am a sensitive, vulnerable, yet critical individual. When I was younger, of course se I did not know what Feminism was, but as I observed some things throughout my time in school, I began to notice discrepancies in the ways boys and girls were being treated. Our teachers separated us by gender and I saw how some things that were acceptable for boys were not for the girls. We know now that this is Sexism. Female students were hurt, verbally abused and even sexually abused by male students and that was accepted, passed off as "normal". Injustice is a huge topic for my work, I can't bare the idea of class and discrimination based on gender between living beings. Naturally, I started becoming aware and protecting myself in the areas in which I could be hurt or abused within my female environment. Now I know this to be Feminism :-). My perception of the world did not change, it only became stronger, so these feelings are still alive in me and I have a powerful tool to speak out about my observations and feelings — this is Art.

Otherwise, what was your first feminist work ? Could you describe it ?

My very first Feminist work was definitely one of my earlier ones: "Self-Defloration", 2006. This is a collage on fabric. Attached in a woman, the defloration is happening by a woman, alone.

How would you define your work ?

I am a visual artist. In my projects I focus mainly on gender, identity, LGBTQAI - activism; it's political, minority rights, environmental change, immigration and human relation issues. Humor is important to throughout my work as well, since humor generates hope. I work with diverse media: painting, photography, video, performance, sculpture as well as installations. I am particularly connected to fabric and the strong notions of time and space in history it is able to provide. I sometimes paint on fabrics or use them to cover my sculpture; fabrics can create bodies. Fabric transcends time and allows one to understand and relate to other periods. Fashion is always inspired by global, historical and political shift, which make it all the more interesting.

What do you want to tell in your artworks ?

I try to talk about many injustices, I criticize systems of class and rules created by men about the artificial and inhuman, body rules that stem from major conservative politics. Sometimes artist can function as newspapers, some issues are not in the public's daily life and then come artists, who realize something about it and make people confront these issues and talk about them. Local matters become global dilemmas.

I strongly believe in the strength of the visual arts, especially when it takes place in public spaces. I ask curators to exhibit my work in store windows or on billboards. Sometimes people don't have the time to listen to another individual's reality or they simply don't want to listen at all. In such situations we can show images and the message can be easily digestible without any personal pressures. The visual arts are a great form of

communication. It is unimposing; it is able to convey what language can not almost instantaneously.

Could you explain us your work *Escape cactus* ?

Escaping Cactus has a very funny story. I think it was in 2012, I was walking in New York City around the Chelsea area and in front of a store I noticed a cactus pot that was tied with a chain to a store door. It was probably a precaution to keep the cactus pot safe from thieves. Plants will become larger and grow bigger if we set them free and plant them in nature, but small plants are small because we want them to fit into our small living spaces.

It is not a good idea, in my opinion, to integrate wild things into our lives, this can't possibly create a wide horizon for humans. A feeling or a territory is free to exchange its owners, material objects are just things that will disappear. We should share our money, we should give our clothes away, human should share even their conditions good or bad, as all other animals practice to live together.



Is there a work you would like to talk about ?

I would like to talk about a new work that is called "TORN", 2018, Photo-Video Installation. I met my friend, Didem Gökem Gecit, for the first time a few years ago at the trans parade in Istanbul. At that time, he had just arrived from Izmir to participate in the Gezi Parki Protests. He wanted to start a new life in Istanbul and tried to do every job he could be hired for: a super market cashier, in construction etc. Sadly during all his employment experiences, he noticed ongoing sexual harassment from his colleagues in a variety of work environments. It was very hard to change jobs everything this happened, so he gave up trying to do a casual job and decided to get a breast surgery to become a sex worker in Istanbul.

One night a few months later she was kidnapped and robbed by 3 men and they cut her neck; Didem was nearly dead. She was also blackmailed by other local trans sex workers in her neighborhood who did not want to share their working territory. Life became very hard

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in Istanbul for my friend Didem and finally last year she moved back to Izmir. Four years later, I created a photo and video project with her. She is standing in front of a fabric that is hang on a laundry thread, staring into the audience's eyes while an annoying signal sound from the video is playing. We notice the scare on her neck, it is the cut from the violence that she experienced. At the end of the video she goes out of frame to reveal to the viewer a cut hole in the middle of an old piece of fabric. To make one feel as "Other" is an act, which only happens to fill in the emotional emptiness in our own physiology.



What are your next projects ?

For an artist it is very hard to survive from art and to contemplate projects without any distractions. I always have collected ideas and projects on the side to realize but other ideas arise from somewhere else into my life. Some important exhibition invitations, international projects like biennials are hard to decline and crucial for a professional artists career.

In 2018, I realized many works for different projects. Now it is time to go back to a project that I have been working on since 2011. At the moment I am searching for the right people to collaborate with. I am quite and introverted person, most of my time I to spend at my studio since I need silence and solitude to clear my mind for all of my new plans. This is the difficulty of working with different media. For me it would be so much easier to be a studio artist, but I am not.

May 2019 I will have my first New York gallery exhibition opening at C24 Gallery in Chelsea. I also plan on joining some residencies to work on new video and photo projects also on fabric and paper collages.

What are your contemporary artist inspiration ?

I am mostly inspired from living issues, things that I witness, what I can see with my own eyes. Things that I can't see, places that I can't go usually don't inspire me. It is hard for me to think of a place or story that I did not experience myself. Women inspire me a lot, luckily I have many strong women around me. I receive fabrics from friends, sometimes from my mom's friends and these fabrics inspire me a lot, some found in people's dowry. They are full of memories even if they are very old.

A tip for beginner artist ?

They should not follow other artists too much, spending time in their individual worlds is very important to finding one's own path.