

**AN INTERVIEW BY KARIN MEISEL WITH NİLBAR GÜREŞ
AFTER THE EXHIBITION 'THE SEEN AND THE HIDDEN; DISCOVERING
THE VEIL' AT THE AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM, NEW YORK (MAY 22,
2009–AUGUST 29, 2009)**

KARIN: How would you describe your socio-political role as a Turkish artist in Austria?

NİLBAR: I don't believe that, as an artist, I need to take on a socio-political role in the sense of having a specific mission. But in my works I deal with certain socio-political issues arising from current identity politics, regardless of the fact that this sort of view is present in Austria, Turkey and elsewhere. One should be especially careful with the roles offered by the Austrian mainstream society. Through the allocation of such roles, you are quickly put into a specific category. I am from Istanbul, and I live and work in Vienna—that's it. I hope that my art can be interpreted outside of geographic contexts.

KARIN: In your video 'Undressing', you address the topics veil and scarf. To what extent does the veil serve as an inspirational source for your artistic production?

NİLBAR: I personally have never worn a veil and also think that it is irrelevant whether women cover up or not. But to me it is highly problematic when women experience social discrimination because of wearing a veil, or when their images are exploited for election purposes by populist right-wing parties, as has been the case in Austria in recent years. This is when I feel the urge to react as an artist. In my video performance 'Undressing' I try to explain that most Muslim women in Europe—with or without veils—first of all represent their own, individual selves and not any religious or nationalist ideas. In my other works the veil also comes into the picture but in different contexts and forms, as an everyday, personal object that belongs to the women, not necessarily as an object of discrimination or religious symbol. Other than that, the veil is not a big issue for me.

KARIN: Your collages are highly detailed, homosexually charged female spaces. Why?

NİLBAR: Women spend lots of time together in private spaces. But what goes on when women gather in private spaces? What do they do when they meet? My collages show conversations, affinities, disputes, infatuation or sexual advances among women. I wish for changes and more solidarity with and among women. My drawings are about how women determine their own lives, their own identity, their own sexuality, and by doing so strategically transform and change their environment together with the spaces linked thereto and also their desires and situations.

KARIN: How would you describe the reactions towards your art? Do the reactions in Austria differ significantly from those in Turkey?

NİLBAR: I think the globalized world in which we live today and, in particular, specific art spaces—where works addressing social and cultural issues are exhibited—show an increasingly similar understanding of works of art, no matter where they were produced. Due to socio-political changes, geographic shifts as well as migration and changing market strategies all over the world, many of these issues resemble each other everywhere in the world. Therefore, it is for instance possible that the veil issue is discussed in Turkey and in the EU at the same time. While in Turkey the debate is system-related, in Europe such issues are exploited in the wake of populist politics and scaremongering in order to create stricter immigration laws. That is why the reactions and the reception may vary, even though they are not relevant in my approach to these topics.