

## Behind the Art: “Rose of Sapatão”

By Nilbar Güreş



Rose of Sapatão, 2014. Produced for the 31st São Paulo Biennial with the support of SAHA. Photo by CHROMA Istanbul. Courtesy of Galerist Istanbul.

Nilbar Güreş's "Rose of Sapatão" is the cover art for the June 2020 issue: The Queer Issue XI.

During the last months, I've been painting at my home studio, which I normally don't do because I never have this much time or this emancipated state of mind. Working only for myself, without Skype appointments, flights to catch, or schedules to follow, has been a relief. To work freely feels like a blessing—because I was not working on a commission, I did not have a given concept, and, most importantly, there were no deadlines!

When Words Without Borders contacted me about my work “Rose of Sapatão,” recently featured in the Queer Issue XI, I didn't know at first what they were asking for. I clicked the link to the magazine and thought, “OK, it must be about 'changing connotations!’” Because this was what “Rose of Sapatão” did, too—so that was the connection from my work to a literary magazine!

“Rose of Sapatão” is a work that I created for the 31st São Paulo Biennial. “Sapatão” means “big shoe” in Portuguese, but it can also be a derogatory word for a queer woman, depending on who uses it and in what situation. (For more information, please ask native speakers!) In “Rose of Sapatão” you see a shoe with a rose blooming out of it, reaching toward a dildo to give it a queer kiss. One observes the desire of the rose growing out of the big shoe.

The whole scene takes place on an Anatolian-style low table designed for eating on the floor. The table is covered with a beautiful handcrafted cloth whose edges are decorated with little dildo shapes in rainbow colors. This tablecloth is a piece from my dowry chest, which my mom prepared for my

wedding; mothers in Turkey traditionally start collecting dowry items when the newborn is a girl. For my artwork, I reconstructed the tablecloth with queer symbols. This changes the connotation, as well as the context and the environment of the work and our understanding of it.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have experienced many similar literal and visual changes in our lives recently; with deadlines and projects canceled, we've heard a lot of comments like "This pandemic is nature's revenge!" This sounds odd, and I'm not sure if, deep down, it is a sadistic or masochistic comment, but to me it clearly connotes guilt.

During the last three months, shy creatures have appeared again, grass has grown high, paths have become invisible. It feels to me like we humans are now subject to nature's whims, and it was with this in mind that I created my most recent paintings.

The pure, pure wildness of nature is back. Some of my palm trees have both bananas and coconuts growing from them. Transgender individuals receive coconuts or bananas provided by these good-hearted palm trees. A trans man drops his breasts because their time has come to leave, it is time to recreate his body; this painting is called "Gravity." The apple tree helps him, and the sun feels happy and confirms this action, raising its hand to say, "Well done!"



"Gravity" by Nilbar Güreş, 2020. Photo credit: Reha Arcan.

To the left of the image "Walking Lake," a palm with coconuts, bananas, and made-up eyes is protecting a person in the hot zone. The lake with a whale tail is approaching to cool the air.



"Walking Lake" by Nilbar Güreş, 2020. Photo credit: Reha Arcan.

In the painting "The Sea Said Fuck Off!", nature has created its own environment. A coconut tree shares its coconuts with a female figure, and a banana tree passes bananas to a male figure to enjoy. Don't you like this landscape? Then please leave!



"The Sea Said Fuck Off!" by Nilbar Güreş, 2020. Photo credit: Reha Arcan.

I wish we artists could work as freely as we do now, but without a pandemic or state of emergency. Most of the time I dream of a residency in which we visual artists can just read and aren't obligated to deliver a new project. True support would not expect a response.

Grass grows high, paths become invisible, but do not worry about artists—we will find a way, like many others who survive in constant unsafety. OK?