

Fatma Bucak

While the Dust Quickly Falls

11.6.–
2.10.2022

In *While the Dust Quickly Falls*, artist Fatma Bucak asks us to consider how political violence accelerates environmental destruction and climate change, particularly in the Mediterranean region. The exhibition moves across disparate geographies—Eastern Anatolia, the Golan Heights, Damascus, Sardinia, Baghdad, and Istanbul—connected by the catastrophic impact of conflict and war on their ecologies. It poetically dwells on the loss of biodiversity, endangered and extinct plants, humanity's interdependence on non-human beings, and healing. The artworks in the exhibition raise the question: how are we ethically implicated and entangled in ecological transformation?

Fatma Bucak lives and works in London and Turin. Her works in performance, photography, sound, and video center on political identity, religious mythology, and landscape as a space of historical renegotiation. Investigating the fragility, tension, and irreversibility of history, the power of testimony and memory, her practice often questions traditional forms of history-making as well as cultural and gender norms.

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This is Fatma Bucak's first solo exhibition in Germany and it is supported by the Italian Council (9th Edition, 2020). The new works will enter the permanent collection of MAMbo – Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna.

Curated by Kari Conte in collaboration with Kerstin Flasche & Christiane Mennicke-Schwarz (Kunsthau Dresden)

Texts: Kari Conte

Entrance room left hand side

Perpetual lure and insistent fear, 2022

350 Screen prints (monotypes)

Each of the 350 screenprints delicately crafted into stone-like sculptures in *Perpetual lure and insistent fear* represents one of the remaining wildflowers of the Golan iris (*Iris hermona*). These endangered irises grow almost exclusively in the Golan Heights, a militarized zone where tank exercises and settlements have trampled them. Furthermore, climate change, cattle grazing, and expanding vineyards have decreased their populations. Many of the irises that still exist grow in minefields.

The artist has reimagined the Golan iris's deep purple veins, brown spots, and underlying white and lilac colors. She presents them here as a field and with colors that do not adhere to reality: crimson reds, sharp yellows, green, indigo blues, and verdant greens. *Perpetual lure and insistent fear* proliferates the irises again, in a place accessible to all. They take form of stones, as a reminder of their natural environs where they grow in rocky basalt soil. Yet, they are not heavy. As fragile paper stones, they suggest, in the artist's words, that "nature, although strong, can no longer recover itself."

Pavillon at the courtyard

Hate to disturb this precious silence, 2021

Four-channel video installation, 10' 31", 13' 16", 13' 21" and 8' 14"

For *Hate to disturb this precious silence*, the artist collected a cast-off piece of timber from an urban construction site. In the subsequent video performance, she sits in her studio cradling and repeatedly sanding away the roughness of the wood. The sound of the sanding is like a mantra that aids her concentration as she carefully and

slowly removes surface debris and uneven parts of the wood. It is as though she is healing the plank by undoing the damage it sustained.

The work meditates on humanity's profound connection to and dependence on nature and, at the same time, the precarity of living on a planet critically threatened by environmental destruction and climate change. This sense of uncertainty extends to the accompanying composition developed in collaboration with Bahar Royaher, which integrates the sanding sounds into a musical score.

Window front, courtyard

Damascus Rose, 2016–ongoing

Damask Roses grown from grafted rose cuttings from Damascus, Syria

Project realized with the support of Italian Council (2022)

Damascus Rose is a long-term project initiated by the artist that attempts to recultivate the Damask rose, a much-loved and once ubiquitous rose species found in Syria. Due to the continuing Syrian civil war, many of the Damask rose fields in the country have been abandoned. In 2016, the artist read that their production decreased by 70 percent, and she "wanted to approach the subject in [her] own way, starting with the soil. What is the process of bringing something from Damascus to another country and trying to cultivate it?"

Thus began an arduous journey in which the artist "smuggled" more than a hundred Damask roses out of Syria and grafted them onto other roses since they traveled as branches without roots. She then planted them in flower beds, and Bucak's Damask roses have been shown in exhibition spaces worldwide in various configurations and quantities. Nurtured by the staff of each exhibiting institution, some have grown better than others. A few of these Damask roses have been planted inside the Kunsthau Dresden, where they will hopefully bloom and prosper. The *Damascus Rose* project builds upon central ideas present throughout the artist's practice, those of borders, trauma, the displacement of people, and memory.

A Tree, 2022

Mosaic made from diverse burned forest materials collected during the 2021 fires in Eastern Anatolia and other areas in Southern Turkey

Last summer's Mediterranean forest fires were precipitated by heatwaves and sweeping droughts brought about by climate change. These fires were the most widespread in Turkey's history, and more than 150,000 hectares of land burned, hastened by the state's unpreparedness and by their negligence.

A Tree is a 12-panel mosaic assembled from thousands of burned organic remnants from the 2021 Mediterranean forest fires. The artist collected tree branches, bones, ashes, metal, and stones by hand during walks in forests in Turkey, and she thinks of the work as a tree "composed from its ashes." It builds on a long cultural tradition of mosaics by utilizing broken and closely set pieces to form an image.

The artist gathered the materials in *A Tree* from areas in Eastern Anatolia with significant political relevance, where the fires lasted for weeks. Forest fires are politically charged events in this area, whether natural or instigated by individuals. In this sense, *A Tree* points to the detrimental impact that state violence has on the environment.

Black Ink, 2019

Typographic print made with ink created from burned book ashes

Created with movable type, *Black Ink* documents the recipe for the ink used to print its letters. The recipe states the tragic events of its origin—ashes from a burned Kurdish book and razed house were added to a solution to create the ink. The Kurdish language has been long-persecuted in Turkey. *Black Ink* bears witness to the burning of a Kurdish publishing house in Diyarbakır, a city in southeast Turkey. Alas, fires have been deliberately incited throughout history to destroy cultural heritage and memory, as is the case for the fire at the center of *Black Ink*.

First Floor
North wing hall

Sum of the misdeeds and consents and cowardly acts, 2022

10 bronze sculptures, textiles and wood

Project realized with the support of Italian Council (2022)

Sum of the misdeeds and consents and cowardly acts is an installation of ten bronze birds that inhabit Iraq, cast into weights. All the represented birds are designated as vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered on The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. This list accounts for the health of the world's biodiversity and is also an essential resource for conservationists. Some of the birds in the installation are dependent on Iraq's marshlands, and the drainage of their areas over decades for political aims has compromised their habitats.

All the birds are cast in resting poses and in different sizes and weights; the largest/heaviest is the most critically endangered, and the smallest/lightest is the least endangered or vulnerable, according to the Red List. From largest to smallest, the bird species are: the Slander billed Curlew, Sociable Lapwing, Basra Reed Warbler, Steppe Eagle, White-headed Duck, Saker Falcon, Macqueen's Bustard, Greater Spotted Eagle, Marbled Duck, and the Common Pochard.

The birds—installed on a Middle Eastern folk textile—are conceptually based on a Mesopotamian weight shaped like a bird that was part of the collection of the National Museum of Iraq until it was looted during the war two decades ago—to date, it is unrecovered. Connecting endangered birds to ancient weights implies value; humankind used weights for trade to determine the worth of commodities. In this sense, *Sum of the misdeeds and consents and cowardly acts* asks: What is the value of non-human life in conflicted territories?

Curtain

They burned it all, 2022

Two-channel video installation, 4' 17" und 8' 47"

Project realized with the support of Italian Council (2022)

They burned it all is based on Bucak's fieldwork in several of the Mediterranean 2021 wildfire sites. This video installation brings together two performances: the first enacted by the artist herself in a charred forest landscape and the second performed by five pairs of singers in a municipal theater in Istanbul.

The synchronous videos point to the essential role of listening and speaking in healing. As the artist carefully crawls along the blackened terrain, she listens intently into the earth, now

devoid of life. This endless loop of her journey is interjected by a singer who cannot make an utterance. At the same time, the singer, along with the other nine members of her choir, prepare for a performance, yet as it begins, they are motionless on stage, staring ahead with total concentration as though suspended in time. Although they are unable to sing it themselves, they hear their song. It interprets the phrase "they burned it all" into a lament. However, they sing each letter alone in a broken sentence in Kurdish—a language not heard in most theaters in Turkey. And so we hear "Her tişt şewitandin," letter by letter.

Great hall

Numbing silence covers us like fine dust, 2022

Soil, ash collected from the 2021 Tunceli forest fires, wood and sound

Project realized with the support of Italian Council (2022)

Soil is the "living, breathing skin of the Earth."* It supports, in some way, nearly all life on earth's land surface and is therefore of critical importance for ecosystems and humanity. The immersive installation *Numbing silence covers us like fine dust* draws attention to soil desertification after high-intensity wildfires. While some fires can be beneficial for soil, high-intensity fires destroy soil's nutrients, and it can take decades to regenerate scorched earth. Remarkably, the ash produced by fires is often full of nutrients and helps with soil restoration.

For this work, the artist visited forests in Tunceli, a Kurdish-majority province in Eastern Anatolia after they were decimated by wildfires last summer. In the 1990s, Tunceli suffered environmental destruction as a result of violent conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). While there, she gathered ashes and soil for this immersive installation reminiscent of a cutout slice of a mountain. It simultaneously activates the viewer's senses of smell, sight, and sound, bringing a complex geography thousands of kilometers away to Dresden. Bucak also recorded the sound of the unproductive soil throughout the area, with microphones submerged underground to pick up the sounds of emptiness that reverberate through barren earth. These recordings were then amplified and incorporated into a minimal composition developed with composer Bahar Royahee. Enveloping the entire space of the installation, the composition actualizes the silence and lifelessness that permeates burned forests.

* William Bryant Logan

The gift of sight, 2022

Performance

Project realized with the support of Italian Council (2022)

During the three days of the exhibition's opening weekend, the durational performance *The gift of sight* will take place on, in, and around the installation *Numbing silence covers us like fine dust*. Performed by a single dancer in intervals throughout the three days, the performance contemplates resistance and the displacement of people due to conflict and ecological devastation. The dancer will activate the installation's arid landscape, seemingly growing out of ashes in an act of perseverance.

South wing hall

An Interlude, 2022

Living garden with approximately 100 plants and metal shelves

Project realized with the support of Italian Council (2022)

An Interlude is a living garden archive assembled by the artist in collaboration with Bettina Bein-Lobmaier, a medical plant specialist. The installation features more than a hundred plants used throughout history for distinctly dual purposes: in small amounts for healing human illnesses and injuries and in large amounts as toxic substances that can induce harm. Many of the plants have been used since ancient times for these purposes.

The 17 species of plants cascade through the gallery on industrial shelves used widely in workspaces such as a garden shed, laboratory or library. The plant's medicinal usages range from narcotics to tonics, sedatives, anti-asthmatics, stimulants, analgesics, expectorants, laxatives, digestives, and anti-inflammatories. Equally far-ranging are the plant's origins: they are found on five of the seven continents (excepting Australia and Antarctica).

During the exhibition, this garden will grow and provide a moment of pause from everyday and a space of metaphorical healing for visitors. It points to the critical need to conserve and protect species for both the health of the planet and humanity.

Information for your visit as regards the pandemic situation can be found at: www.kunsthauseidresden.de

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