

ArteEast, octobre 2022

Artist Spotlight with Gözde Ilkin | ArteEast

ArteEast is pleased to present an interview with artist Gözde Ilkin as part of our Artist Spotlight series.

Gözde İlkin (b.1981, Kütahya, Turkey) completed her BFA at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University painting department in 2004 and her MFA at Marmara University painting department in 2012. Selected solo exhibitions include *Stand Alone and Altogether*, artSümer, Istanbul (2019); *As the Roots Spoke*, MAC/VAL Val-De- Marne Contemporary Art Museum, Paris (2019); *Organized Habitation*, Galerie Paris- Beijing, Paris (2019); *The Trap*, Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2016); *Stained Estate*, Heitsch Gallery, Munich (2015).

She has participated in artist residency programs at the Watermill Center, New York; IASPIS, Stockholm; MAC VAL Museum, Vitry-sur-Seine, Paris; Pioneer Works, New York; Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris and Künstlerhaus Bremen.



Kopru/Bridge, 2020, Stitching, painting on duvet dyed with plant extracts (Pegnanum harmala); black: embroidery on dyed fabric, 112.5 x 186 cm



Rüzgar The Wind, 2019, Sticked seeds and patchwork on vintage tablecloth dyed with plant extracts, 158 cm diameter

ArteEast: Can you tell us about your work in general and the main themes you return to in your practice?

Gözde Ilkin: Initially, I started working on covers and fabrics that I inherited from my family. Through fabrics, I was able to approach concepts of home, family and a sense of belonging. Transforming them into something new turned into a daily ritual of collecting and processing. Working with textile and sewing is an act of re-planting; transferring feelings of the past and present onto fabrics that themselves bear the memories of different times and places.

Forms and habits related to rooting down and that define domestic relations are the basis of my

practice. I collect household fabrics belonging to different people and cultures from my travels. The motifs and stories on them are a means of keeping the memory of the period and place they come from. The hand-embroidered motifs of the fabrics are, in a sense, their first marking; I am interested in how their patterns have changed over time and how they have been transferred to the present as memory objects.

Fabric is a ground on which I stage life, not only as a material, but also alongside its memory and keeping in mind its function as a carrier or container. The plants, stones and pieces from nature that I collect from my travels help me follow traces of soil and the memory of places I passed by. Throughout my practice, I am discovering a common memory, different forms of rooting, and of being human, animal or plant.

AE: How did your relationship with textiles first develop? How have you approached learning, incorporating and experimenting with new textile techniques within your practice?

GI: I had the chance to work with thread and weaving at the carpet atelier at Mimar Sinan University Faculty of Fine Arts. There, we shared our ideas and works, and created art with materials other than paint and canvas. This is when I discovered how to think with a needle and thread instead of paint, and how to weave an idea by penetrating the material.

After completing my studies, I focused on how people settle in the areas we live in through furniture and fabrics. I also took an interest in family stories, asking questions such as: how do we stage our personal presence at home? Inspired by family photos, I started working with fabrics such as tablecloths, curtains and sheets that we used daily at home. The themes I chose emerged from inside the house; a place of deep connection.

The way we use fabrics is shaped by our needs and intentions. The presence of fabrics in our daily life, and the motifs they carry from the past to the present, reflect on what and how we cover things in our lives. Fabrics for me are memory objects, spaces where my questions, thoughts and feelings are on display.

I see used fabrics as bearing the traces of past periods; they speak with motifs. To me, they can be considered as inscription documents. The practice of working with fabric and sewing are materials that expose vitality via art and crafts.

AE: Tell us about your most recent solo exhibition, *Entrusted Ground*, which opened at .artSümer on September 14 and is on view until November 12, 2022. Elaborate on the intersection of the four elements, ritual, spirituality and the sensory within your work in this show.

GI: The installation consists of fabric works inspired by forms in nature. They come to life in three-dimensional forms and settle within the gaps/voids to create a whole. These pieces and collages were created to explore death and mourning as understood by human beings; in nature,

each ending gives way to another beginning. The idea of an entrusted ground, a representation of the layers of spiritual and physical memory, is found in shamanic rituals inspired by the elements of air, water, earth and fire to make the cycle of nature, and they are accompanied by movement and sound.

Together with Duygu Demir, the exhibition's curator, we wanted to design the space as a physical and mental cave. At the entrance of this cave are two works that welcome the audience: *the Wind*, a white work on tablecloth that oscillates in the air, and *The Crag*, an antique sheet referencing cave paintings on which I stitched and embroidered seeds. *The Entrusted Ground* consists of choreographic pieces that are both fixed in the space and that can also change form and be moved as part of the performance. These represent the ground (*The Crust*), the water (*The Umbilical Cord*), filled fabrics that represent human emotional states (*Fragments of Emotion*), and pieces I collected and sewed on from nature (*Those who Remember Their Births*).

In the accompanying solo presentations on video, Barış Diker, Alara Erdem, Umut Özdoğan and Nazlı Durak each represent one of the four elements within Aslı Öztürk's choreography piece. We can experience the transformation of these pieces of nature with our bodies throughout the exhibition.

The audio component of the exhibition comes from three different channels, and is produced by Berke Can Özcan. It is possible to navigate the space like different landscapes that change and stretch as you shift your point of view. Intertwined with performance and sound, every piece that moves and contacts each other offers a multi-layered landscape where the ground can become a word, a home, or even a second skin.

At the end of the exhibition, in a sense, in the nooks and crannies of the cave, we find traces of a kind of shamanic ritual that feeds on the energies of heaven and earth, reminding us that human beings are one with nature. In this last chapter, we reach the human voice and the figures on fabric works. As you walk through this series of arrangements exhibited in Korea (at the 13th Gwangju Biennial, curated by Defne Ayas and Natasha Ginwala, 2021) titled *As the Roots Speak, the Cracks Deepen*, you will hear the whispering of a prayer written and voiced by author Sema Kaygusuz.

AE: You participated in a residency at the Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne (MAC VAL) in the Summer of 2019. What was this experience like and how has it impacted your practice?

GI: In 2019, I was on a one-month residency program at the Paris MAC VAL Museum of Contemporary Art, which was previously used as a nursery garden. I had the chance to work with gardeners in the community gardens in the Vitry district where the museum is located. I collected the stories of how seeds root and grow in the soil with seeds brought by gardeners from different geographic backgrounds, and followed the traces of the gardens that turned into common living spaces. I collected samples of plants that represent the story of these people; that could in fact, actually change the memory of the soil. The seeds that had different geographic origins brought

with them their own properties, thus changing the habits and characteristics of the soil they later encountered.

I embroidered the survival strategies and stories of the plants that I collected from the gardens onto domestic fabrics gathered from the region. Every fabric in the installation became a plant, and each plant became part of the MAC/VAL Garden.

Before my solo show, *Entrusted Ground*, I had the chance to work with a dancer, Aslı Bülbül, at the Watermill Center in New York. My fabric works and their motifs inspired Aslı Bülbül's performance. We went through a month-long process where we experienced the traces of nature together with the body and through movement.

When I shared this experience with Duygu Demir, we decided to work on a show that included both a fixed exhibition and a moving stage where every piece would be activated by performance. Inspired by the ground and the characteristics of the four elements, this collective work started to settle, move and be reborn.

AE: Your projects have involved collaborations with other artists, musicians, performers and choreographers. How did you arrive at this creative methodology and why is it an important part of your work?

GI: The idea of working with Duygu Demir had been on my mind for a long time. We came together in my most recent exhibition thanks to Aslı Sümer. With each working session, our conversations about home, belonging, and rooting down evolved. We came up with the idea of a landscape that comes out of the surface of the fabric and stretches with the forms that spread throughout the space. With this constantly changing landscape that appeared while working together, I had to go beyond my comfort zone. My relationship with fabrics, forms and figures expanded. We went through a collective work process in which things evolved into a landscape that moved with abstract language, performance and sound. We worked on the performance with Barış Diker, Alara Erdem, Umut Özdamar and Nazlı Durak, each representing the four elements in Aslı Öztürk's choreography. Berke Can Özcan recorded the sounds of the earth as memory notes, and this was used to create the *Entrusted Ground*.

When I met Aslı Öztürk, who works on somatic body awareness and whose work I had been following for some time, I was creating pieces that could stretch with the body and movement, as well as that could be fixed to create a landscape in space. Pieces such as *The Crust* (ground), *The Umbilical Cord* (water), *Those who Remember Their Births*, *Cinder and Light*, and *Fragments of Sentiment* that stretch, turned into a shelter for the body and movement that emerged from and were shaped by performance. I do not consider these fabric works as costumes, but as Duygu defines them, they are choreographic objects that can flex with performance or stand still. The choreography and fabrics that constantly move and shape with the body, where dancers can explore movement and gestures, formed the stretched spaces and landscape pieces of *the Entrusted Ground*. The movement of the body in the pieces was instrumental in creating a wholly

different experience for me in which every figure and picture I embroidered on the fabrics came to life.

Working with four dancers who represented the four elements, Asli choreographed a range of movements, from tiny radical movements to bodily jolts, where each element touched the other to initiate the movement. We worked together and had long rehearsals where we shared stories and processes on shamanic rituals, rooting, relationships with the earth, and explored the characteristics of water, air, and fire. From its inception to the present day, we have created the *Entrusted Ground* by touching on the painful process of being human, and exploring the realms of death and rebirth that open up space for each other, as in nature.

AE: What are you currently working on and do you have any shows or projects upcoming in 2022-2023?

GI: A few months ago in August, I worked on a series inspired by the Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur's textile collection for the exhibition *Venedigsche Sterne*, curated by Susann Weis. In *Every Current Filling a Void Moves Stones* (2022), I trace motifs resembling those found on fabrics used in birth and baptism ceremonies passed down from generation to generation in different geographies and systems of beliefs. The works are on view through November 20, 2022.

Another project I am currently part of is *Breaking Boundaries*, a traveling exhibition that started in Turkey and moved to Italy, Germany and Holland. It brings together 12 emerging artists, selected by 8 curators, who will exhibit their work in 6 art spaces in 4 countries in the course of a year.

At the moment I'm working on an upcoming solo exhibition at Gypsum Gallery in Cairo opening in December and another solo exhibition that will take place in Paris in September 2023.