

Neither Mythos, Nor Utopia

14.04.2017 | Ahmet Ergenç (translated into English by Sezgin Aleçakır)

Named after the definition of İstanbul in Ekrem İşın's book "Everyday Life in İstanbul", Burçak Bingöl's exhibition titled "Mythos and Utopia" will be displayed in Zilberman Gallery İstanbul until April 29th. The exhibition emerges as a follow-up and the last chapter for Bingöl's previous exhibitions, "Cabinet of Curiosities" in 2011 and "A Carriage Affair" in 2014. In her exhibition, the artist contemplates - from her timeline - the pasts of the city she lives in and the material she uses; she builds a new scene regarding today. Moving from Ankara to New York and to İstanbul where she has finally inhabited, she juxtaposes the remaining fragments inherited from past eras lived in this city dwelling between "the mythos of the East and the Utopia of the West".



Burçak Bingöl, "Falling Into I", Ceramics, metal, 25 x 85 x 78 cm.

Ceramic, by itself, is an extremely traditional material, yet Burçak Bingöl creates works beyond tradition with it; she utilizes pre-modern ceramics to narrate the 'modern world', the present times. Thus, from a conflict of material versus subject, she provides a new viewpoint.

There were very clear examples of this 'conflict' in her exhibition titled "Cabinet of Curiosities". By creating the objects like gas bottle, tank - normally produced from plastics [or metals] - out of ceramics, she had transformed the meanings attributed to those objects and she had turned these ordinary objects into fragile objects that could indeed be placed in the 'cabinet of curiosities'. She had applied the same approach to security cams and [by replacing them] with ceramics, she had attributed a fragile meaning to these otherwise metallic, cold, remote security cams.



Burçak Bingöl, from the exhibition "Cabinet of Curiosities":
Left: F[ol]lower III, 2011, Ceramics, metal, 33 x 34 x 38 cm
Right: Unforeseen Transformation_tank, 2011, Installation; Ceramics, 25 x 19 x 9 cm

It is possible to define this strategy of Burçak Bingöl as the creation of 'visual oxymorons'. Juxtaposing two normally contradicting images having opposite meanings and associations (like flower engraved ceramics and metallic security cam) to create a new meaning space or a hybrid meaning. One of the first to employ this 'conflict strategy' or 'visual oxymoron' strategy was Méret Oppenheim; in her famous installation 'Breakfast in Fur' dated 1936, she had distorted the meaning attributed to the teacup by covering it with the fur of a wild animal, thereby creating the impact on reality aimed by surrealism. Oppenheim's teacup had invited the wild nature to a courteous, fragile table, café. It could also be said that Burçak Bingöl is doing just the opposite: covering nonfragile things with a fragile surface. In "A Carriage Affair" also, which was a continuation of "Cabinet of Curiosities", she had fused the 'rigid, modern and mass-produced' parts associated with automobiles with the soft and antique feeling of ceramics. She had narrated, in that exhibition, the 'east vs. west' problem standing at the center of Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem's

A *Carriage Affair* through this apparent 'conflict' between the objects. In addition to the 'balloons' - reminding of 'breath' (ney, east, etc.) - exhaled from cold metallic parts, she had also wrapped some metallic parts with velvet. This was a sign of the clash, in *A Carriage Affair*, of the metallicity of top model cars with fezs, laces, ney.



Mèret Oppenheim, Breakfast in Fur (Le Déjeuner en Fourrure), 1936



Burçak Bingöl, "Cruise", 2014, Ceramics, 200 x 190 x 30 cm

Burçak Bingöl's new exhibition "Mythos and Utopia" is a continuation of her previous two exhibitions and follows the same track after those exhibitions. The title of the exhibition again conveys a very explicit 'east - west' reference: "the mythos of the east, the utopia of the west". Yet, contrary to the previous two exhibitions, in this exhibition she is interested in breaking rather than making, in shattered fragments rather than a new 'synthesis'. While she used ceramics as a new aura enveloping contemporary objects before, she now exhibits the fragmentation of this aura. That is why, a very multi-fragmented feeling surrounds the exhibition.

"Mythos and Utopia" opens up with a video displaying this fragmentation. The artist sits at a table, in a state of nervous waiting and then, suddenly, she pushes the ceramic vase on the table to the ground, fragmenting it. The remaining works are mostly related to this fragmented ceramic.



Burçak Bingöl, "Re-collection" (detail); 2016, Ceramics, 55 x 8 x 31.5 cm

Works like *Re-collection*, *Fragments* and *Hasbahçe* convey a feeling of nostalgia to the exhibition. It feels as if there is a desire for an 'imaginary' time when everything is more whole, the fragments remain together or a desire for the mythos and the esthetics of the east. We are familiar with such a view that progresses through dual contrasts; since the reorganizations of the Ottoman, in these parts, these dualities like past / now, tradition / modernity, whole / part, society / individual, feeling / mind have always pestered people

who think and create. I believe the exhibition has another streak that breaks these familiar dualities: a streak that does not freeze tradition as a nostalgic entity, but that questions tradition as well. For example, in the work 'Rooted', we see a lump of formless clay under a vase. This 'hybrid' work reminds us that tradition is not the 'root' either and that the real root is a 'nature' before culture or beyond culture. In the work titled 'Mini Reform', on the other hand, we see the effect of a lump of clay that 'ruins' a traditional vase. That elegant object meets clay and all 'traditional' values hidden behind that elegance are ridiculed. In the work titled Reform III, we encounter a somewhat ill-shaped flower or maybe a weed growing out of a flower-patterned vase. This again, could be viewed as a move that reveals the power of the formless one, of the 'grotta'. In the work titled 'Native Formation', we see the flower patterns on a vase melt and pour away. The natural process is generally somewhat like this, a formless and amorphous flow.



Burçak Bingöl, "Rooted", 2017, Ceramics, 30 x 28 x 39 cm



Burçak Bingöl, "Contact", 2017, Glazed Ceramics, 34 x 16 x 13 cm

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The relationship Burçak Bingöl has established with the formless one comes to light plainly in the work titled *Flux*. Remaining more close to an open-ended 'flow', rather than immobilizing matter and state, this work conveys the feeling that the material called ceramic is also 'liquefied'. That is to say, in a sense, tradition 'liquefies'. In other words, 'everything that is solid liquefies'. I had mentioned in another text before: This is an expression of both 'complaining' and 'liberation'. When solid things (local - traditional values, relationships in a settled society, etc.) vaporize, a probability cloud of 'senselessness' and 'liberation' may surround the world around. In the process of transition from tradition to modernism, it is understandable that when 'solid things' vaporize, this brings forth both 'nostalgia' and a joy of 'liberation', but genuine critical thinking is mastered through removing the past from being an absolute object of 'nostalgia' and realizing that it is something 'constructed' as well.

Much as it seems that this latest exhibition of Burçak Bingöl has been based on a duality between past - now, east - west, I believe it takes one step more, gets radical and abandons these two contradicting poles to open the door for a third possibility: it is not 'either mythos or utopia'; it is not even 'mythos and utopia'; I think what this exhibition truly says is: 'neither mythos, nor utopia'. It is not dichotomy and synthesis; it is fragments and the third way.

