

Mythos and Utopia: A Past So Familiar, So Foreign

The final chapter is the most intimate.

The first impulse was to gather the fragments of the city. Silently, spirited through the dreamtime streets, the artist unearthed objects—and images—excerpted from the urban stream. She placed them in her cabinet, where they were at once certain and hesitant, recognized yet receding, fragile and unafraid. Ultimately, the cabinet held the *flâneur* herself—the assembled pieces became whole, seen through the prism of her personal quest.

The next was to explore a fragmented identity. Western industry vs Ottoman heritage—from this tension sprang an interrogation of the nature of creation. For *Cruise* (2014), Bingöl molded a truck façade, fragmented and reunited the ceramic pieces in a reconstituted truck-front adorned by traditional motifs. Here, the artist was a detached analyst and orchestrator, reigning over the constellation of ceramic-bulb-appendaged spark plugs, valves and velvet-clad springs—the mechanics manifesting her highly critical gesture.

Now, the impulse is to embrace—Istanbul, its past promise, its future wish, its creativity and its very materiality. There is no detachment here. This final chapter is fashioned from the residue of midnight walks through Galata, peering at the heaped ruins, savoring the tiny weeds that creep through the cracks of abandoned time. It is crafted from the constant rummaging through the drawers and cupboards of collective memory, spilling out its lingering forms and flowers.

“I have not created anything,” divulged Bingöl, slyly. “I have only reconfigured what was already there.”

Reconfiguration is perhaps too innocent a term in Bingöl’s hands.

Propelled by similar impulses guiding *Cabinet of Curiosities* and *A Carriage Affair*, she wrestles with the past. One embrace of the past is enthusiastic, reveling in the quasi-nostalgic superimposition of two times, two images—a double exposure of the valorized past and the quotidian present. The other approach is vetted to the point of being dismissive. The past is relegated to the periphery, like some inconsequential material with no relevance to our current configuration—persistent yet unwanted.

Bingöl’s “reconfiguration” is at the fulcrum of these two glances at the past. She dives into the pot of collective consciousness and resurfaces with vessels. Ignored, overlooked, the shapes she uses are so commonplace as to be obscured. They are invisible the way Austrian writer Robert Musil described monuments as being imperceptible, “impregnated with something that repels the gaze.”



Tabii Olanla Ahenk İçinde / *Rooted Matters*, 2016
Seramik / *Ceramics*, 37x33x41 cm
Özel Koleksiyon - Brüksel / *Private collection - Brussels*

Recalling these shapes—putting them in front of the very audience that has relegated them to insignificance—is itself a radical breed of reconfiguration.

But it goes on. Reconfiguration also involves a degree of destruction. And re-creation. If previous chapters of this Zilberman trilogy spotlighted how fragments were gathered and then reconstructed, *Mythos and Utopia* insists on the act of breakage. If, before, we were asked to celebrate the whole, now we are confronted with a sense of incompleteness, of partiality. This is a realm where mistakes and abstractions abound.

Falling Into (2017) is the commonplace, “gaze-repelling” Ottoman vessel, shattered. What seems to matter here is not the breakage itself—destruction as some dark flipside to creation—but rather the crevices and the cracks that the breakage has yielded. These surfaces are at once material and temporal: they are the fruit of a moment, nonexistent and inconceivable beyond the time-bound gesture of breaking the vessel; yet they are newly appropriated spaces onto which another styling unfurls. They are wounds that become faces. From accidental, they become carriers of meaning.

The surfaces harbor new details. The floral motifs on these cracks are themselves constantly shifting scale—sometimes they are close-ups of petals; other times, all writhing stems and nodding buds. But they are always the same flowers. The real ones—digitized to create the motifs—are even present in the show, like withering witnesses to the spectacle of artifice, assessing just how they have become stylized by the cultural past.

Similarly, *Rooted Matters* (2016) is temporal, yet questions the nature of material. Is the vessel freeing itself from its material constraints? Or is the clay clump finally liberating a restless expression that was slowly forming within? In its own way, the freeze-framed moment casts a narrative that problematizes the act of making.

Contact (2017) pursues this exploration of process, calling attention to the glue-like glazing that binds wayward pieces together. Its breakage—the appended shard—bears motifs on its craggy edges. The “accident” adheres seemingly willfully to the ideal. Recalling such shapes unearthed in digs and throning in archaeological displays, the piece mimics yet another construct of the past, yanking it out of its peripheral doldrums and hoisting into the limelight.

As a visit to any archaeological museum will confirm, ceramics endure. When fired, the material becomes timeless. Yet unfired, it is highly vulnerable. Largely neglected by contemporary art, clay nonetheless plays perfectly into Bingöl’s discourse on time. In the site-specific *The Last of the Golden Ages to be Lived* (2017), clay clings to the wall in a feeble embrace. The motifs, from the Topkapı Palace, seem tenuous, as if all the stately power of those initial meanings could glide off the wall unnoticed. The message is powerful, the gesture sublime.

Mitos ve Ütopya sergi kataloğu
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Restlessness courses through these works. The material itself seems to have a will, as if it is striving to be something else. A new vein of abstraction, particularly in a work like *Settling Deep Within* (2016), foregrounds this shift to material-as-creator: the artist let the inner piece detach itself, then partially glazed it with the decals of the flower petals. The creative act is problematized by the random action of the material; the resulting work hinges on formlessness. What meaning, the artist seems to ask, can we give to forms we cannot define?

Mythos and Utopia unfolds under a central tension, much like the one that racked the modern Turkish identity in *A Carriage Affair*, yet specifically fixed on the city of Istanbul. Mythos is its past, a counterpoint to Utopia's future: Mythos is "here," Utopia elsewhere; Mythos is the lived, Utopia the promise; Mythos defines its origin, Utopia a desired destiny. Bingöl's past work has explored the idea of alienation—the wandering self on a quest to belong—most notably in the 2012 series *Unforeseen Transformation*. Within the context of this hybrid Istanbul (for the artist, Mythos and Utopia complement each other to form a balanced whole), she has dug so deeply into alienation that her interrogation has landed her, oddly perhaps, in the lap of tradition. Today she gazes into the past of the material itself, and resolutely says something new by reconfiguring that tradition. Ceramics are both foreign and familiar—the stuff of tourist stands, the elusive artifact sprung from immemorial ground. Bingöl's "reconfiguration" has conjured an intimacy with Istanbul, her new home, and its creative legacy. The ultimate testament to her communion with the city is *Ground Memory* (2016): a clay impression of the cobblestones in a Galata street. It is a literal connection—imbibing, absorbing the urban fabric in a poetic embrace of past and present.

This may be the final chapter. But there are many tales still to unfold.

Kevin Jones