

Uses of the archaeological past in Istanbul's contemporary art scene

by anamedblog

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Before starting my residency at ANAMED, I was very much looking forward to dive into Istanbul's art scene, which I had imagined as a vibrant constellation brimming with art galleries, museums and exhibitions. My expectations were not disappointed, as the city's cultural life is currently further enriched by the events happening under the umbrella of the 15th Istanbul Biennale. Something I had not foreseen, however, is the presence of a distinctly archaeological sensibility in the works of so many Istanbul-based artists. In hindsight, this should not be so surprising for a city whose complicated identity resides widely in the stratification of people, things and stories that have inhabited the shores of the Bosphorus throughout Istanbul's long history.

In this short article, which is not or tries to be comprehensive, I will briefly discuss a handful of works that I have encountered in the last few weeks and found particularly interesting and thought-provoking, especially from an archaeological perspective. These works all happen to belong to young and talented female artists: Burçak Bingöl, Canan Budak, Nazlı Gürlek, CANAN, and Hera Büyüктаşçıyan. In their works, archaeological remains are not simply the materialization of the city's far-reaching memory, but also sites of contention and multiple interpretations. For some of these artists, archaeological remains are also starting points for obdurate endeavors of interpersonal connection, not only with the people living in the past but also between humans and other forms of life.

1. Burçak Bingöl, Falling into II, 2017, Anna Laudel Contemporary

As one of the artists featured in the group exhibition "Past meets Present" at Anna Laudel Contemporary in Galata, Burçak Bingöl plays with one of the cornerstones of archaeological imagination: the potsherd. Breaking the usual distinction between form and decoration, she boldly presents a vase in fragments where the only decoration – a colorful Ottoman-style floral design – lies in the cracks, while the surface of the vase is simply glazed white. In this way, the fragments reveal something that the vase in its entirety would have concealed. Winking at the Japanese aesthetics of wabi-sabi, this work is an ode to the beauty of things imperfect and incomplete, as most of archaeological things are.



Burçak Bingöl, Falling into II, 2017