

exhib*ist*

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Anna Zizlsperger talks to

İNCİ EVİNER
ARTIST

In many of your interviews you mention that drawing — or specifically the line — is an integral part of your artistic practice. How did your interest in drawing start, and would you say that it's still an important part of your practice?

I started drawing when I was 5 years old — I remember it very well, the image is very clear — and I have been drawing since then. Drawing is essential for me. It is a way of getting in touch with the world. Drawing also serves to create some studio programme for me. Talking through drawings, speaking with drawings — It is like a body's gestural movement for me. So all my works, including my video and composite works, photographs and large scale projects, are based on drawings.

I start with the line, and then I think through it — otherwise I can't understand what's happening in my mind. Drawing is an action that allows me to reveal my subconscious to myself. As a conceptual line, it helps me to pick up my thoughts and develop ideas. So drawing is kind of a studio for me, how I relate to my subconscious.

How did you develop your practice in later years at University?

At Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul, drawing is taught as a stage prior to painting. But for me, as a student, drawing was the main artistic medium — It was an independent, artistic, very visual language. By insisting upon using drawing as my main artistic practice instead of painting, I was actually the first to stand up to this kind of very classical, very conventional education, which still persists in Turkey — especially at Mimar Sinan, where it's the same now as it was then: drawing classical sculptures and busts is the basis for the first year, and then later it's just regarded as the first stage of paintings.

Do you feel your drawing practice has changed over the years?

Not really. I started in black and white, with pencil. Later, at high school, I discovered Chinese ink. Since then I've been using Chinese inks, Indian inks on paper. From time to time, the paper sizes change. But I always use sketchbooks.

„drawing is a big part of my life, my main language...speaking and talking with words is not enough for me“

So you sketch directly with ink in the sketchbooks?

Yes. Sometimes with pencil, but mostly ink and brush. When I was a student I was always drawing in my sketchbook, and carried it with me. But recently, I've mostly been using it to take notes. Drawing is a very practical way to think about some matters.

Do you think your environment affects the way you draw?

Drawing is a big part of my life, my main language ...speaking and talking with words is not enough for me. In Turkey the political issues are always very urgent, so drawing is very fast, very banal and very daily, very routine. Maybe we can connect the speed of life to the speed of drawing.

And what about the other way around — Do you feel like your drawings influence your surroundings, where you are at the moment?

Yes, actually. I have a certain vocabulary, visible in my photographic works and videos. For example, I always use these silver, transvestite shoes and hair, women's hair. The drawings give me the opportunity to create a certain vocabulary and, as an action, to carry this vocabulary through to — and transform — different mediums.



Drawings also give structure to my life as an artist. Because being an artist is actually just *being*. So the drawings create some routine.

Like a drawn grid for your life?

Sure. When I come to the studio, it is very natural for me to open the doors and the windows and then start the day with drawings to connect me to the world, to the subconscious and the conscious. It all goes together. It is like a device, like working some machine.

When you combine video sequences with your drawings, how do you go about it?

I create the idea with drawings and then work with my team on the computer, using blue screen, digital compositing and After Effects.

But the starting point is always drawings/ideas. Ideas transform into drawings, drawings transform the ideas. This is the process. Sometimes, if it's necessary, we transform my drawings through the video works, adding different layers to create composites. I like to call my video works 'moving images' because they're just a different drawing dimension, where all these different figures come together.

You have had residencies and exhibitions in France, where the contemporary drawing scene is very strong. Can you tell us about your experiences in France and how the drawing scene is similar to or different than the one in Turkey?

I graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul, where the model of education is very similar to the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Both focus a lot on drawing. Of course, I admired many French artists when I was a student: Toulouse Lautrec and Maurice Utrillo,

for example. And when I got an invitation by Caroline Naphegyi to participate in the *Istanbul Traversée* exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille in 2009, I was very excited.

I was invited to three artist-in-residence programmes in France: Cité International des Arts, Paris in 2008; MAC/VAL Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Vitry-sur-Seine in 2009; and SAM Art Projects, Paris in 2010.

„I believe in the necessity of pushing the limits of representation and unsettling iconography and myth“

During my 6-month residency at Cité des Arts in Paris, I worked on *Harem*, a piece based on an engraving of the same title by French painter and architect Antoine Ignace Melling.

It was a nice coincidence that I was invited to Paris while working on this project. I also rediscovered the French drawing tradition — I searched in museums and libraries for 19th and 20th century illustrations and engravings.

It was a very inspiring time for me, during which I could connect with videos, moving images and drawings. I had enough time to focus on these matters in Paris. But mostly, I am inspired by the streets of Istanbul and the political climate/situation here.

Can you elaborate on your *Harem* video work and Melling's connection to Istanbul?

Melling came to Istanbul on the invitation of Sultan Selim the Third and lived here for 18 years, making engravings of the city with great love. The 'Harem' engraving in his album depicts a space in which weird figures of women roam about. In contrast to the Orientalist tendencies of the period, there are no dramatic or seductive expressions. The women are illustrated with almost scientific precision and look as if they've been thrown out of time.

The Orientalist discourse and the knowledge produced through it is a way of imagining the East. Today, women are crushed under the burden of both Western and Eastern discourses. Is it possible for a woman, who is at the core of this ideological rhetoric and the social contract, to position herself as a subject? My interest in the Harem urged me to articulate these women beyond being objects of knowledge by giving them a voice and pushing them to reveal whatever they hide. I believe in the necessity of pushing the limits of representation and unsettling iconography and myth.

How does this work relate to you as an artist?

I am trying to understand who I am in my own culture through rhetorical figures, representations and images constructed by the Western subject to symbolize and know the East. By oozing into 'Harem,' I want to put in motion the untamable and make these frozen images move to open up the possibility of resistance.

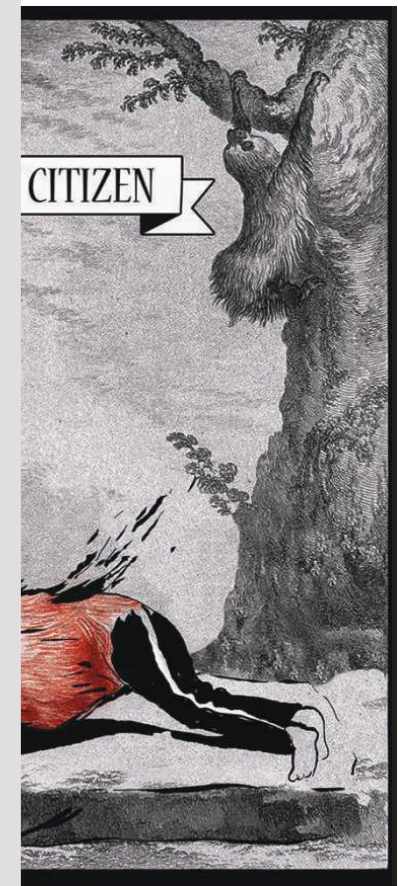
You produced a work called *Nouveau Citoyen* during your residency in Vitry-sur-Seine. The work was purchased by Istanbul Modern and is on show in its current collection exhibition. Can you tell us more about this work?

Nouveau Citoyen comprises a white wall covered in drawings of hundreds of black silhouette figures, with three embedded videos.

The patterns found on touristic postcards I collected from Paris and Istanbul give the possibility of existence to the girls captured in the motifs of *Nouveau Citoyen* and let them tell their own stories. As a way to transcend representation, I borrow strategic sources from wallpapers and Turkish tiles, which become tools of deconstruction that work from within the patterns. Colonial images, which have been relatively excluded from art history, like



An interview with İNCİ EVİNER



İNCİ EVİNER
a work in progress at her studio
Istanbul, 2015
photo by exhibist

monkeys running around in joy or Chinese women involved in a tea ceremony, find a place for themselves, multiply infinitely within the surfaces they occupy and become part of a collective memory.

This ornamental transformation of the 'Other' is the result of a decorative reconciliation: without realizing it, the figures affect our gaze and transform it. To create a space of existence for the 'New Citizen,' I free it from imposed definitions and all the narrow-mindedness of the ideological gaze. To reflect on cultural differences that are suppressed and left out of the political borders of Europe, I hide them in the innocent patterns of the ornament, giving these timeless, frozen images the right to move.

Looking at French and Turkish artists who work with the medium of drawing, are there any similarities or differences you could you point out?

French and Turkish drawing artists have many things in common, but the general intention in drawings by French artists is a bit more surrealistic and fantastic. When I looked at French drawings, I found my own way of drawing to be very unique in comparison because many of my inspirations come from Istanbul. You could say that my style is a bit more harsh compared to the French one, which is more elegant.

Who inspired you when you were a young artist?

Well, as I mentioned, Toulouse Lautrec and also of course Louise Bourgeois — she is a hero for me. From Turkey, I am very impressed by Yüksel Arslan.

His way of drawing was ahead of its time — not using traditional colours but instead ash, honey, egg white and pollen, not to mention bodily secretions...

Yes, he was opposed to traditional painting — was totally against painting as an action, as an artistic practice. So I really appreciate his work. Already as a student I was very impressed by him.

Can you name any interesting young drawing artists from Turkey?

Gözde İlkin and Güçlü Öztürk ...also Güneş Terkol, Erinç Seymen, İnci Furni, Nilbar Güreş and Emre Hüner are good artists working with the medium of drawing.

Do you collect drawings yourself?

Of course! I love drawings. From time to time I exchange works with my colleagues. Nalan Yırtmaç, for example — I like her work very much. I also have some works by Gözde İlkin. I



like exchanging drawings and photographs. And yes, I also have my own drawings on the walls at home...

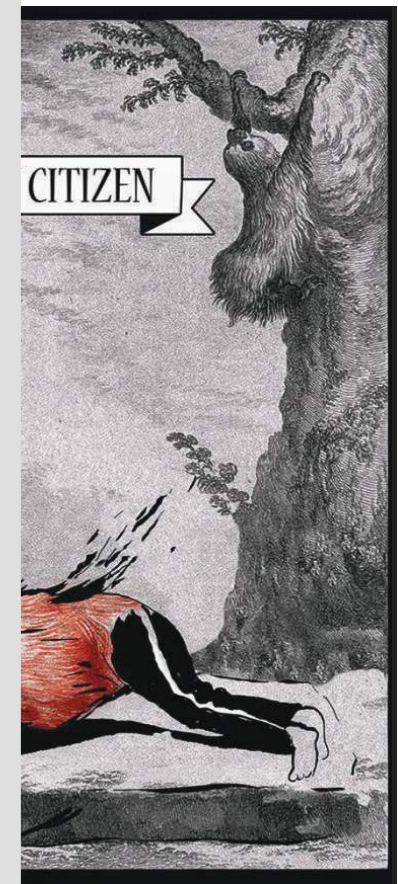
Can you tell us about the work that is going to be part of the exhibition *Spaceliner* at ARTER?

It's a three-channel video work called *Off the Mirror*, for which I used the mirrors I have on the wall of my studio. Some of my drawings became 'actors' seen as reflections, and I also put drawings directly onto the mirrors. I wanted to open the space to symbolic language and imagination. The subject of the 'mirror' itself also refers to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

What other projects are you currently working on?

I have an upcoming exhibition, opening on May 29th at The Drawing Center in New York, where I will show another new, one-channel video work I'm currently finishing titled *Faraway Girls*. In this work I also use my drawings as props that actors impersonate and create a kind of theatre stage for them in an industrial building. It's very tricky — You don't know what is actually happening in the room and what isn't because different stages juxtapose each other.

The transvestite shoes I referred to earlier, which I use in many of my works, appear again. I have them made in the Tarlabaşı area of Istanbul by a shoemaker who produces women's shoes in sizes up to 45. And I always use striped pyjamas as a costume for my actors because of the line context, which works very well with the drawings. I sew them myself!

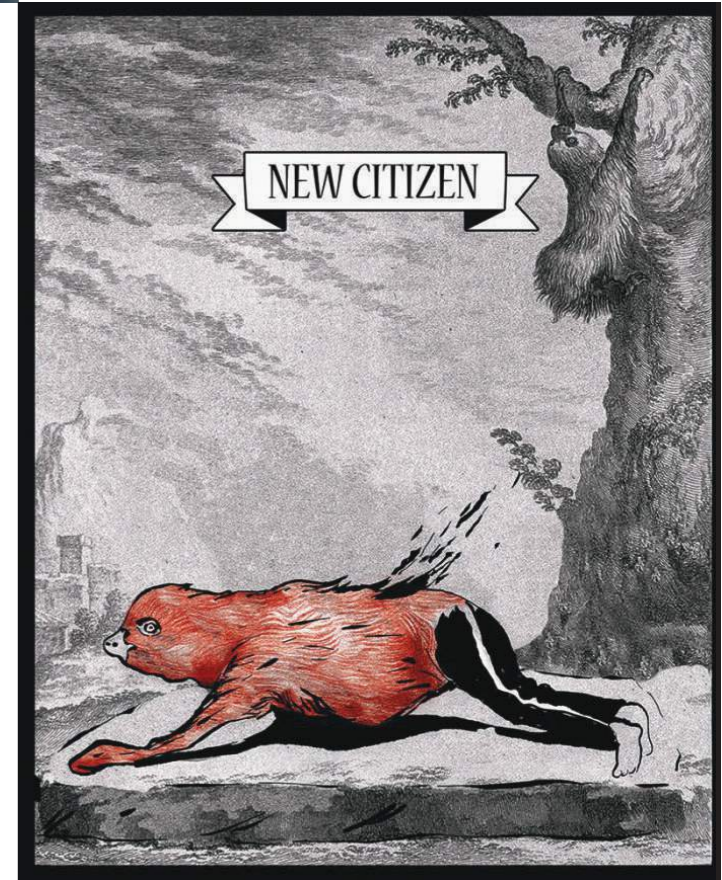




INCI EVİNER'S STUDIO
Istanbul, 2015
photo by exhibist



INCI EVİNER'S STUDIO
Istanbul, April 2014
photo by exhibist



INCI EVİNER
SWEAT SUIT, 2009
from the 'New Citizen' series
silkscreen
70 x 50 cm
courtesy of the artist & Galeri Nev Istanbul