

## 7 emerging artists and curators powering Istanbul's art scene

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**With its biennale and art fairs, Istanbul is becoming a vital arts hub – yet the new generation is struggling from a lack of space and support.**

This year, a spate of independent initiatives are emerging to support the city's young artists and curators. *Art Radar* profiles one such programme, PROTO5533, and the seven talented young forces it is shining a spotlight upon.



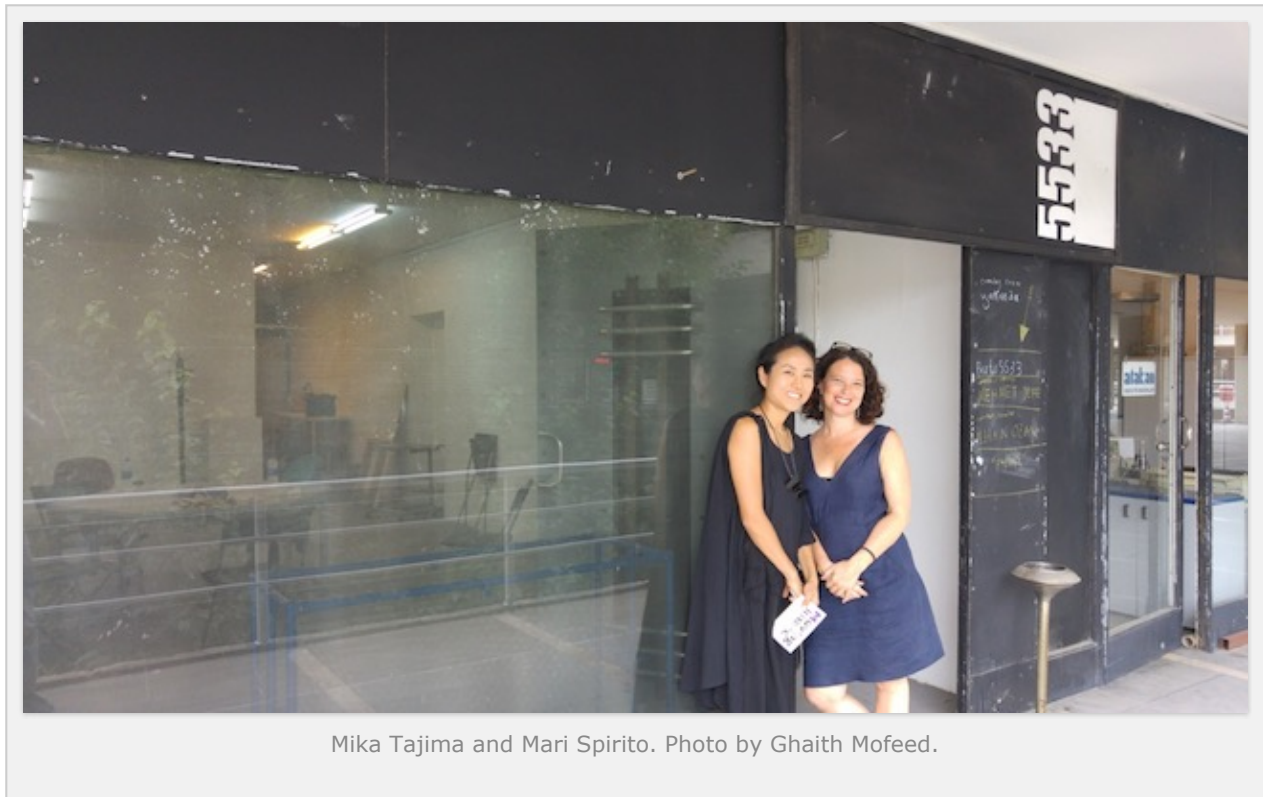
Naz Cuguoğlu. Photo by Zeynep Bolat.

**A new incubator for curators emerges in Istanbul**

**PROTO5533** is launching this August as a highlight of Istanbul's 2015-2016 season. The curatorial platform is the result of two innovative forces coming together: 5533 and Protocinema. **5533** is an artist-run space, created by Nancy Atakan and Volkan Aslan in 2007. The venue lives in the Istanbul Trader's Association (İMÇ), a shopping centre and symbol of the Turkish modernisation process of the 1950s. 5533 was set up to establish a "contact zone" to bring together people from different disciplines, occupations and backgrounds, and to foster contemporary art projects based on critical reflection.

**Mari Spirito** was invited to work as 5533's Guest Director in 2015. Spirito is the founder of **Protocinema**, an independent organization based in New York with an office in Istanbul, which sets up site-aware exhibitions around the world. She knows the difficulties that the emerging generation in Istanbul has to overcome. She told *Art Radar*:

*Working here and organising exhibitions, I met all those amazing talented people. They don't have spaces and come from a range of backgrounds working in museums, galleries or residency programmes.*



Mika Tajima and Mari Spirito. Photo by Ghaith Mofeed.

In her new role, Spirito decided to launch PROTO5533, a year-long series of exhibitions by seven emerging artists and curators working and living in Istanbul, including Naz Cuguoğlu, Kevser Güler, Mehmet Kahraman, Ghaith Mofeed, Nicole O'Rourke, Ilhan Ozan and Ulya Soley. Opening on 29 August 2015, the series will run into 2016 with a monthly exhibition curated by each participant. Protocinema will present the final exhibition in May 2016 with the Japanese-American artist **Mika Tajima**. Volunteer-based and accompanied by the international Mentors Curators programme, PROTO5533 is an incubator where the projects are designed collectively.

The seven young talents being featured in this series may just change the future of Istanbul's art scene. "It's going to help us boil", assures artist Naz Cuguoğlu. *Art Radar* profiles these new faces of Istanbul art.



Ilhan Ozan. Photo by Mustafa Hazneci.

## 1. Ilhan Ozan

**Ilhan Ozan** is a curator, writer and researcher. Born in Izmir, a city on Turkey's Aegean coast, he is now based in Istanbul. Ozan came to the arts from a background in sociology and philosophy. He started to become more involved in contemporary art with the 10th **Istanbul Biennial**.

"I started to think about the social and political potential of exhibitions", he says. "Working on an exhibition primarily means making a statement for me." He then chose to link his practice to the visual arts and currently works in Research and Programmes at **SALT**, an Istanbul institution that explores critical and timely issues in visual and material culture, and cultivates innovative programmes for research and experimental thinking.

Ozan is particularly interested in the process of modernisation in Turkey. His opening exhibition of PROTO5533, "Payback" (29 August – 27 September 2015) brings together two site-specific sculptural works by **Mehmet Dere** that revolve around the social and economic significance of İMÇ. Mehmet Dere is an artist based in Izmir, whose practice is characterised by what is culturally and socially at stake in present-day Turkey. As Ozan tells *Art Radar*:

*İMÇ represents the ideal of economic modernisation at a time when Istanbul was becoming a metropolitan city under rapid urbanisation after [the] 1960s. In the exhibition, we departed from the socio-historical context of İMÇ and sought parallels with the development of a modern lifestyle in [the] 1960s and 1970s in Istanbul, as Mehmet (Dere) deals with certain issues in this period through cultural history.*





Nicole O'Rourke.

## 2. Nicole O'Rourke

Nicole is an American writer and curator who was born on Long Island. After working for New York-based galleries and art fairs, she settled in Istanbul in 2013. She tells *Art Radar*:

*I came to Istanbul when its art scene was still sort of buzzing. I like that the scene is different than New York's. Here it feels more necessary, urgent and more enticing.*

Nicole became the Art and Culture Editor of *The Guide Istanbul*, as well as a contributor for *Time Out Istanbul*, *Istanbul Art News*, *Dazed & Confused* and *Near East Magazine*. She is also working as a Consultant for **Contemporary Istanbul** art fair. For PROTO5533 she is responding to collective behaviours at a time when the Internet and social media play a crucial role in social situations and interactions. She explores:

*... how people became desensitised and apathetic bystanders or witnesses to all kinds of atrocities and accolades, while remaining almost comically unaccountable and comfortable in front of their computer screens.*

Her show will feature video installations of the New York- and Los Angeles-based writer, curator and performer Myriam Katz; **Sirma Doruk**, an Istanbul artist; and photo-collages and video by **Alexandra Howland**, an Istanbul- and Los Angeles-based artist and photojournalist. Her exhibition will be developed further online with a workshop done via Skype about "being an ethical and responsible bystander", as well as a participative online exhibition.



Ghaith Mofeed.

### 3. Ghaith Mofeed

Ghaith Mofeed grew up in the Syrian city of Douma. He says that repression and the war pushed him out of his country and he finally settled in Istanbul in 2013. He reveals that an encounter with Mari Spirito in 2014 allowed him to enter the art world. He worked as a production assistant on Protocinema's exhibition "Dîner Noir". "I started learning," he tells us, "but then I realised that I could do much more." He now works in Istanbul for several foreign art galleries as a production manager.

Mofeed has set out on a research process inspired by the history of his family, his Turkish roots and his complex reality. His project for PROTO5533 thus consists of a narration of this experience. Working as both the artist and the curator of the two-part exhibition, it will be the first step to an archival-based, genealogical exhibition where Mofeed will retrace his ancestor's journey across Turkey, and explore the intricate geography and history of his family. As he says of this purpose:

*I needed to document what happened to me.*



Mehmet Kahraman. Photo by Korhan Karaoyal.

#### 4. Mehmet Kahraman

Mehmet Kahraman is a Turkish art historian and curator. He was born in Izmir and currently lives and works in Istanbul. Kahraman started working as a gallery and fair assistant and with performing arts festivals. He has spent three years as a curator and exhibition coordinator at **Mixer**, a multi-purpose gallery space in the Istanbul neighbourhood of Tophane, and has independently curated a number of exhibitions. He notably co-curated "**31KILO**" in 2014, a cooperation project and exhibition between the Space Istanbul and the Künstlerhaus Dortmund.

For PROTO5533, Kahraman will be revealing an interactive and participative exhibition. Four artworks (artists still to be decided) will be shown to the public as artistic statements. He will then invite the audience to disrupt the plan entirely and question, through this action, the artistic process itself. In the meantime, Kahraman is working on an exhibition based on Theodoros Angelopoulos' *Dust of time* that will be presented in an Istanbul empty storage space in September 2015.





Ulya Soley.

## 5. Ulya Soley

Ulya is a Turkish art historian, born in Istanbul, who studied within the booming art scenes of Montreal and Glasgow. Upon returning to Istanbul, she started working at **Pera Museum** as one of their collection supervisors, as well as taking part in the museum's contemporary projects. She has published in *Istanbul Art News* and Mixer's *ArtWriting Turkey* (a programme



aiming at supporting emerging art writers and critics). She is also a co-founder of the independent curatorial platform **Maybe Art Projects** with Fatma Çolakoğlu.

Soley's exhibition through PROTO5533 will feature video and sound installations of young Turkish artists. Her project sets out to do two things: conduct research on the contemporary that questions the consuming power of the Internet, its influence on social interactions and privacy, and its impact on information flow; and offer a narrative and imaginary window onto a possible new era produced out of this dynamic. She tells *Art Radar*:

*I enjoy thinking about what is going to happen next.*



Kevser Güler.

## 6. Kevser Güler

**Kevser Güler** was born in Izmir. After studying engineering and philosophy, she became a member of the Istanbul Biennial team from 2007 to 2014. She collaborated with **Fulya Erdemci** on the prologue exhibition of the 13th Istanbul Biennial *Agoraphobia* presented in TANAS (Berlin) and *Cappadocia Struck* in Cappadocia, Nevşehir. She is currently working as a researcher with the curatorial team of the Arter Museum, which will open in Istanbul in 2017. She has also participated in the **Gwangju Biennale** and Salzburg Summer Academy curatorial programmes.

Güler's research of late has been on the artistic interrogations, comments and propositions concerning the anthropocene, particularly around the environmental, social and economic consequences of the contemporary politics of living beings today. For PROTO5533, she will be offering an exhibition stemming from her research and talks with artists.



Naz Cuguoğlu. Photo by Zeynep Bolat.

## 7. Naz Cuguoğlu

Naz Cuguoğlu was born in Istanbul and completed a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology followed by a Masters in Social Psychology. She works as a freelance writer for the likes of *Istanbul Art News*, *Trendsetter*, *Artful Living*, *Time Out Istanbul*, and is Co-founder of the independent art platform **Creative Çukurcuma**. She is also the coordinator of **maumau**, an artist residency based in Cihangir where she co-curates shows for Turkish and international artists.

Cuguoğlu's experience and close collaboration with resident artists and writers coming to maumau has helped her to develop her curatorial practice. She tells us:

*You become part of the creation process. I realised that curating is more of a collective process. Being part of it is exciting and I got stuck.*

Her exhibition with PROTO5533 is inspired by Jorge Borges' *The Library of Babel* and the Latin American literary wave of Magical Realism. Represented by authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende, this wave interrogates an acceptance of magic in the rational world through an innovative literary style. Cuguoğlu seeks to underline how this wave still resonates into the social and political context of Turkey and could influence again the contemporary art scene and visual art trends. She points out that the very occurrence of 5533 in İMÇ is something of an act of magic itself.

**Claire Zerhouni**