



Turkey / ART



Istanbul's 13 Best Contemporary Art Exhibitions in 2013



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2013 was a significant year for Turkish art as Istanbul continues to rise above its neighbours as one of the leading players in art in the [Middle East](#) and [Europe](#). Art in Istanbul has blossomed in the past few years, with dozens of internationally acclaimed exhibitions held in 2013; a much discussed biennial and a new art fair were only some of the highlights of the busy year. These are, in chronological order, the most significant exhibitions of 2013.





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Envy, Enmity, Embarrassment at ARTER (January 24 – April 7)

The second exhibition in a series focusing on new productions by the leading Turkish artists Selim Birsal, [Hera Büyüктаşçıyan](#), CANAN, Aslı Çavuşoğlu, [Merve Ertufan](#) & [Johanna Adebäck](#), [Nilbar Güreş](#), Berat Işık, Şener Özmen, [Yusuf Sevinçli](#), [Erdem Taşdelen](#), Hale Tenger, Mahir Yavuz, *Envy, Enmity, Embarrassment* presented a variety of works along the underlying thread of cultural, political and social memory in Turkey across different generations and tropes. Empathy is explored in the universality of conflict as a site of both trauma and reparation, particularly embedded in the transformation of cultural objects as the location of both meaning and transition, both emotionally and

conflicted memory and the debris the process leaves in the consciousness of the community. The exhibition was curated by Emre Baykal.

[ARTER, İstiklal Cd 211, Beyoğlu 34433, Istanbul, Turkey,](#)
[+90 212 243 3767](#)



I Know People Like This III, by Hale Tenger, courtesy of ARTER

Murder in Three Acts by Asli Çavuşoğlu at Galeri NON (March 1 – April 24)

Originally rehearsed, performed and filmed at [Frieze Art Fair 2012](#), *Murder in Three Acts* was commissioned by Frieze Projects in partnership with Delfina Foundation and produced in association with Manifold Projects. [Asli Çavuşoğlu](#) resorts to a professional crew of actors and

and story-building. The artist's work is known for exploring cultural and historical tools that influence the shaping of social and political readings. In this project, Çavuşoğlu compared the methodologies of forensics with those of art historians, opening a field of research in which archaeological artefacts become complex cultural constructs subject to change in meaning.

Galeri NON, Tomtom Mh, Nur-i-Ziya Sokak 16, Beyoğlu 34400, İstanbul, Turkey, +90 212 249 8774



Murder in Three Acts by Asli Çavuşoğlu. Courtesy of Galeri NON.


[Aeolian by Emre Hüner at Rodeo \(March 9 – May 11\) and Nesrin Esirtgen Collection \(March 15 – June 15\)](#)

[Emre Hüner's](#) solo exhibition *Aeolian* running parallel in



exotic and remote landscapes is an inverted reflection on industrial processes, blurring the line between the forces of nature and manmade spatial and cultural architectures. The abetted ruins of modernity, found in abandoned tropes, confront us with the question of the manmade world as an internalised process of civilisation, in which it is hard to differentiate between the geological forces that have shaped the earth and the traces of human history, and thus construct another reading of utopia and dystopia. The ceramic installation *Anthropofagy*, displayed at [Rodeo](#), presents us with a model of spatiality, which is an architectural, geological and historical ruin.

[Rodeo](#), *Siraselviler Cd 49/1, Yeni Hayat Apt., Taksim 34437, Istanbul, Turkey, +90 212 293 5800*

 *Aeolian* by Emre Hüner.

Aeolian by Emre Hüner. Courtesy of Rodeo.

Shirin Neshat at Dirimart (May 10 – June 15)

This long-awaited Istanbul exhibition of [Shirin Neshat](#), Iran's most important contemporary artist, presented works from different projects. The white cube space at [Dirimart](#) was covered with Neshat's 'Mourners' from her series *The Book of Kings*, inspired by Persian epic and






University, Neshat presented some of her most famous video installations, questioning the role of women in Islamic societies and transgressing cultural power through a deconstruction of gender that emphasises the role of language and representation in the formation and transformation of cultural identities. The exhibition was curated by Hans Peter Schwerfel.

Dirimart, Abdi İpekçi Cd 7/4, Nişantaşı 34367, İstanbul, Turkey, +90 212 291 3434

In Situ by Hera Büyüктаşçıyan at PIST (May 22 – June 15)

Set in the traditional Istanbul neighbourhood of Pangalti – now an island of urban history among an ocean of gentrification where **PIST** is located – Büyüктаşçıyan’s installation is an attempt to relocate mental space not as an abstract construct but as a site associated with three-dimensional palpable experience, which remains altogether emotional. Looking at the modern archaeological artefact and thinking of how, in classical archaeology, *in situ*, referred to the object not torn off from its original context, Büyüктаşçıyan re-staged the famous Pangalti hamam, once located a stone’s throw from her installation, based entirely on hamam soap. She shifts from mental into mnemonic space by opening the possibility of exploring relationships based on spatial memory. A week after her installation was finished, the [Gezi Park protests](#) set off nearby, investing



 In Situ at PIST.

In Situ by Hera Büyüктаşçıyan. Courtesy of PIST.

Sign, Symbol, Image by Selim Birsal, Mel Bochner, Frank Nitsche, Ilhan Koman, Charles Sandison at Egeran (May 23 – July 19)

One of the last shows held at [Egeran](#) featured five different artists whose work is centred on the formal qualities of line, form and colour. Across a wide range of formats, the artists examined the boundaries between representation and meaning, based on abstraction. Highlights of the exhibition included a photography work by [Selim Birsal](#), presenting a far and distant view of Turkey taken from [Cyprus](#), obscuring in its rather clean aesthetics, the isolation of Cyprus and the strong political implications of images. [Mel Bochner](#), one of the leading American conceptual artists since the 1980s, presented his text installation paintings in which the formal qualities of painting precede over the text as essential and defining. [Ilhan Koman](#)'s sculptures, inspired by kites and formally drawn from Minimalism, explore the infinite possibilities (and readings) of simple structures, stretching into infinity.

[Egeran, Kemankes Mh, Tophane İskele Cd 12, Beyoğlu](#)



Gallery view. Courtesy of Egeran.

Transition at Yapi Kredi Cultural Center (August 1 – April 15, 2014)

One of the most ambitious projects of the year in Istanbul, and more than an exhibition, *Transition* is an extended ongoing project exploring the boundaries between video and performance as a temporal break, through which public and personal spaces re-emerge and merge in a continuum of streamlined rupture. Selecting a number of leading performers and video artists, from all latitudes – including [Ana Prvacki](#), [Anahita Razmi](#), [Anna Konik](#), [Guido van der Werve](#), RemDans / Tuğçe Tuna, [Harold Offeh](#), [Jesper Just](#), Lida Abdul, [Lucy Beech & Edward Thomasson](#), [Nicoline van Harskamp](#), [Nigel Rolfe](#), and Victor Alimpiev – the curators have brought together an impressive map-in of the present human condition, as the site of a discontinuous narrative in which the relationship between images and the self is not dialectic but one of mutual construction and disclosure. Highlights of the project include the performance *Give Me A Body Then* by [Ali Cherri](#) presented live in August, as well as works by [Bjørn Melhus](#), Maria Jose Arjona and Fatma Bucak. The project is curated by Basak Senova and Fatma Bucak. The final exhibition and book launch will take place in February 2014.





A Book of Songs and Places by Maxime Hourani at 5533/13th Istanbul Biennial (September 2 – October 20)

The most remarkable project within the much criticised [13th Istanbul Biennial](#) was the Lebanese artist-cum-architect Maxime Hourani's *The Book of Song and Places*, a project of collective authorship combining relational aesthetics with documentary, research, performance and music. Consisting of a number of workshops spread across different sites of rural life, urban transformation and axes of central power in the city, professionals from different fields mapped the imaginary of the city through story-telling, examining and documenting traces of the physical transformation as potential narrative vehicles. Sound surveys of the sites, coordinated by sound designer Korhan Erel, provided the performative element in this complex exploration of the relationship between site and historicity. The project was curated by Fulya Erdemci, curator of the 13th Istanbul Biennial.



A Book of Songs and Places by Maxime Hourani.


A Book of Songs and Places by Maxime Hourani. Courtesy of the artist.





Through its commitment as a transnational non-profit organisation between Turkey and the United States, [Protocinema](#) brought to Istanbul a new work by the American artist and geographer [Trevor Paglen](#), whose work, at the intersection between technology, aesthetics and politics, has extensively mapped the obscure sites of surveillance and the technological colonisation of public space. In *Prototype for a Nonfunctional Satellite*, Paglen aims to subvert the means-ends orientation of technology by producing a satellite based on aerospace engineering. The ultimate goal is to redirect the essence of military technology from a tool of political control into a techne, bringing down to earth a critical artefact, questioning the colonisation and privatisation of airspace. The simultaneous weightlessness and large size of the satellite function as a critical reading of globalisation; throwing us onto new spaces both open and closed.

[Protocinema](#), *Various Locations, Istanbul, Turkey*,
+90541 468 0214

 Trevor Paglen

Trevor Paglen. Courtesy of Protocinema.

[Despair & Metanoia by Şükran Moral and Valie](#)
[Export at Galeri Zilberman \(September 12 –](#)





understanding and perception of performance, long before it became an established format, through unconventional works amalgamating activist and feminist strategies. In this duo exhibition, Moral presented her single-channel video 'Despair', confronting us with the realities of illegal immigration from the East toward the West, without adjusting to filter to any narrative, and clean from tragic pathos. Export, one of the most important Austrian living artists, presented the work *Metanoia*, an installation-format compilation of twenty-nine of her video performances from the 1970s until today, highlighting her pioneering role not only in feminist and activist art, but also her pioneering role in video art as a surveyor of power mechanisms.

Galeri Zilberman, İstiklal Cd., Mısır Apt. 163, Beyoğlu, Istanbul, Turkey, +90 212 251 12 14

 Valie Export

Valie Export. Courtesy of Galeri Zilberman.

Bodies That Matter at Galeri Mana (October 10 – November 16)

Drawing on artworks by Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, [Jumana Emil Abboud](#), [Bashar Alhroub](#),





Contemporary Arts and the British Council, focusing on Palestinian and British artists – the exhibition tackled Palestine as a laboratory of modernity where the constraints of bio-politics can be grasped with extreme urgency. The lack of sovereignty and unbound extension of power have turned Palestine into a body politic – a surface in which political powerlessness is not a metaphor but a living reality of the state and the self. Highlights of the exhibition included [Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme](#)'s video installation *Lost Objects of Desire*, exploring the transformation of the Palestinian resistance movement into a body of authority, and the late Mustafa Al Hallaj's engravings that turned Palestine folklore icons into a narrative of resistance. The exhibition was curated by Rebecca Heald.

[Galeri Mana, Kemankeş Mh, Ali Paşa Değirmeni Sokak 16–18, İstanbul, Turkey, +90 212 243 66 66](#)

Karin Kneffel at Dirimart (October 24 – November 23)

Perhaps the most significant painting exhibition in Istanbul in 2013, [Karin Kneffel](#), one of the most influential German painters of the generation, brought to Istanbul a series of her iconic paintings, inspired entirely by Turkey. Attracted to Istanbul because of the work of Bruno Taut, a German modernist architect who was forced out of Germany during the Weimar period and spent his final years in Istanbul. Kneffel constructed





paintings in time in order to become fully aware of her syntactic procedure. Reality becomes hypostasised in almost cinematic frames that are simultaneously located in different temporal junctures and expand far beyond the canvas.

Dirimart, Abdi İpekçi Cd 7/4, Nişantaşı 34367, İstanbul, Turkey, +90 212 291 3434



Karin Kneffel

Karin Kneffel. Courtesy of Dirimart.

Interpretation of Cage / Ryoanji by Sarkis at ARTER (November 15 – January 12, 2014)

Sarkis, the grandfather of Turkish contemporary art, returns to Istanbul with this exhibition, *Interpretation of Cage / Ryoanji*, in which the artist finds inspiration in the famous Ryoanji Zen garden in Japan, by-product of his encounter with John Cage's flute scores, presented here as *Flute Partition Ryoanji / Cage according to Sarkis*. The 96 watercolours, conceived as fingerprints on blank paper, resemble calligraphy, examine and apply the dot and the line as universal vehicles of meaning in both Western and Eastern culture, and blend remote locations as visible soundscapes.

Musicians Kudsi Erguner and Jean-François Lagrost

