



Under

19 March - 31 May 2018

THE YARD | ALSERKAL AVENUE

HALE TENG ER

ABOUT THE INSTALLATION

Hale Tenger's installation *Under*, 2018, is a free-standing structure made from corrugated metal, the same material of Alserkal Avenue's existing buildings. The choice of Tenger's materials means that there is a moment where *Under* blends in with its surroundings – from the outside it looks like everything else in The Yard, an ordinary building among many in the warehouse district. This is not by chance. The external aspect of this work brings up considerations of systems and power structures that are in place now, and which have been in place for generations. Since these systems are so deeply ingrained in our societies, in our regions, and in our world, they are undetectable, permeating everything, working silently.

At this moment in history, cracks are appearing in many of these existing systems and structures. There is the feeling that we are at a breaking point and potential shifts are on the horizon. *Under* is sensitive to these dynamics and builds on Tenger's long-term interests and working methods, beginning in the early 1990s with *Necessity of Air* at the 3rd Istanbul Biennial. In this work, Tenger transformed an empty, windowless gallery space into a replica of a forgotten period room in a quiet

historical museum. It differed from an actual museum in that it contained subtle signifiers of oppression, and the silencing of that oppression.

Once visitors enter *Under*, another world is put forth, an intimate stage shared with a single tree. There is no roof on Tenger's structure, so the tree stretches up towards a clear open sky. This is an immersive space, one that viewers do not just look at – we participate in this artwork, we become part of it. This experience is essential to Tenger, as she describes in a conversation with Ahu Antmen: "Just like we construct the world of novels in our mind, these fabricated environments push ajar the door of one's imagination. Considering the work has constituted a stage for the viewer, one can envisage that each viewer will leave with his/her own experience of the work."¹

Inside *Under*, the viewer and the tree are immersed in sound, which Tenger created with her long-time collaborator, musician Serdar Ateser. The first layer of sound is that of a bird, perhaps two, flying fast and close. The following sounds come, the sound of a voice, a voice of a woman or women, speaking softly, telling a story, line by line:

*long after hunters and gatherers
still in the time of plenty
it was a pastime named shooting
hunting no more
under the same old rules of the game
of some will eat and some will serve
men set up nets in the forest
stretching low among the trees
the birds framed underneath
could no longer fly high
later on they took away the nets
before the party started
accustomed by then only to fly low
birds fell prey to men before knowing
they had forgotten to fly high*

Under originates from Tenger's memory of a fictional narrative that describes an ancient hunting ploy used by aristocrats. Nets were set in the woods much earlier than the hunting date, stretching low throughout the forest so that the birds became accustomed to living under the nets, adapting by only flying low. Once the nets were removed the birds would no longer fly high, as if they had forgotten, thus becoming easy prey for the noble hunting parties. This practice continues today. Tens of millions of game birds being bred at farms set in nature with nets.

The physical and psychological experience of Tenger's installation touches on many aspects of human behaviour and systems of control,

social as well as civic. *Under* is about the feeling of being pushed down and coerced, and the normalisation of those feelings. The installation's experiential nature brings up associations via sensations – what it feels like to be in Tenger's closed-in structure; what it feels like to have the sensation of birds flying low around your head; what it feels like to have a net separate you from the sky. Human beings are highly adaptable; it is a survival mechanism. The processes of behaviour modification are slow; they take advantage of this adaptability through reinforcement of specific actions, to condition people into seeing and interacting with the world in a specific way. This work expresses a feeling that is shared from Tenger's home in Istanbul, to its site in Dubai, as well as across global contemporary societies.

In order for any change in long-standing systems or structures to occur, first the act of recognising them as such needs to be acknowledged. Even to the smallest degree. This will shift perspective, allowing alternate ideas to co-exist. Tenger's installation asks, "How have we adapted to the conditions of our time?" and "If birds can forget to fly high in the sky, what have we humans forgotten?"

¹ Hale Tenger in conversation with Ahu Antmen, *Stranger Within*. 2007, Monograph, Ahu Antmen, Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Publishing House

BIOGRAPHIES

About Hale Tenger

In her wide range of production, Hale Tenger creates three-dimensional narratives inspired by diverse historical, political and psychosocial references. Built by an unconventional use of materials, audio and video, her works focus on presence and experience. By operating with the qualities of mood, sound, texture and affect, her installations, whether creating an uncanny atmosphere or a meditative one, trace out the relationship between presence and absence, material and intelligible. Tenger's narratives often oscillate between sameness and alterity, between fragility and persistence. Audio is integrated into most of her works in various forms, either as an exclusive music, as a narrative or an arrangement of archival recordings.

Tenger has exhibited extensively since the early 1990s. Besides her large-scale installations, single or multi-channel video works, sculptures and photographic prints are also part of her practice.

Tenger has also participated in various biennials including the 57th Venice Biennale (2017); 3rd and 4th Istanbul Biennial (1992 & 1995); Sao Paulo Biennial (1994); Manifesta 1, Rotterdam (1996), 2nd Johannesburg Biennial (1998), Gwangju Biennial (2000), 8th Havana Biennial (2003), 1st Haifa Mediterranean Biennial (2010). She lives and works in Istanbul.

About Mari Spirito

Mari Spirito is Founding Director and Curator of Protocinema, realizing site-aware exhibitions in the world, since 2011. Spirito has programmed Art Basel Conversations since 2014, and is Associate Curator of Visual Arts, Onassis Cultural Center, New York and Athens. She launched Alt Art Space, Istanbul, and was its Curator and Director from 2015 to 2017; served as an Advisor to the 2nd Mardin Biennial, Turkey, 2012; and was Director of 303 Gallery New York, 2000–2012. She is President of the Board of Participant, Inc, New York and holds a BFA from Massachusetts College of Art, Boston.

PROGRAMME

Artist talk: Hale Tenger in conversation with Mari Spirito about the ideas and process of *Under*, 2018

Wednesday, 21 March | 11AM

This talk will address the artist's main concerns, represented here as both physical structure and ephemeral birds, how this audio installation came to be and origins of the fictional narrative at its core.

About Alserkal Programming

Alserkal Programming is a platform for exhibitions, public art commissions, performances, films, talks, and workshops that critically and creatively investigate themes pertinent to the region's arts community.

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