

PROTOCOLCINEMA & *poşe*

This edition of ProtoZine accompanies *A Finger for an Eye*, curated by Alper Turan within Protocinema's Emerging Curator Series (PECS) 2021, and presented in partnership with Poşe Artist Run Space. *A Finger for an Eye*, group exhibition with commissioned works by Baha Görkem Yalim, Cansu Yıldiran, Dorian Sari and Istanbul Queer Art Collective (Tuna Erdem & Seda Ergul).

Exhibition dates: February 25 – March 26, 2021
 Visiting hours: Tuesdays – Fridays, 13:00 – 19:00
 Location: Poşe Artist Run Space, Bereketzade, Hacı Ali Sk. No. 8 Daire 6, Beyoğlu, Istanbul

Launched in 2015, **Protocinema Emerging Curator Series (PECS)** is a mentorship program that provides professional training in the form of learning through doing. Protocinema Emerging Curator for 2021, **Alper Turan**, was mentored by: **David J. Getsy**, Goldabelle McComb Finn Distinguished Professor of Art History, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; **Krist Gruijthuisen**, Director, Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; **Maura Reilly**, Independent Curator and **Mari Spirito**, Executive Director, Curator, Protocinema, Istanbul, New York.

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Kingdom of the Netherlands

swiss arts council

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THE
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baha görkem yalim

a monument for the unfound
2021

tripod system, stroller, plaster,
aluminium, flower arrangement
multi dimensional

remembrance's stench
2021

single channel colour video without sound, in loop
44" 47"

cansu yıldiran

fallacy
2021

4 foil print photographs: 178 x 140 cm, 120 x 80 cm,
80 x 55 cm, 120 x 80 cm

5 fine art print photographs: 30 x 20 cm, 30 x 20 cm,
30 x 20 cm, 36 x 30 cm, 50 x 31 cm

dorian sari

look
2020

sound of video in loop
3'30"

untitled
2020

whistle
4 x 2 x 1.5 cm

me, me, me, me
2021

balloon
multi dimensional

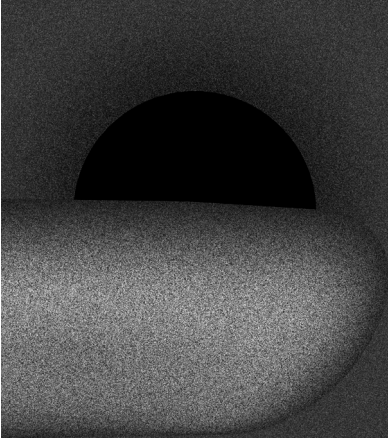
untitled (you, me, inside, outside)
2020

belt
multi dimensional
(3 pieces)

istanbul queer art collective

you do not have to follow the instructions
2021

6 performance instructions and
mixed medium installation



a finger for an eye
text by
alper turan

Repression without a heterosexual and a smile in minds.

is a cat smile in streets, without a cat homosexual

Guy Hocquenghem
from *Screwball Asses*
1973

When it's grey, between light and a water drop

While the hate speech, targeting, public repression, and everyday violence against the queer existence in Turkey are not new, it is crystal clear that, since the beginning of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, the LGBTI+ movement and its public visibility are increasingly coming into the government's crosshairs. In the last year, LGBTI+ people have been publicly dubbed by high officials and opinionators as great *haram* subjects, partners of Western plots, poisoners of young minds, perpetrators of generational disaster, pedophiles, people with low morals, and people against nature. Correlatively, there is an ongoing systematic LGBTI+ hunting that has been operating mainly in the visual regime and through the optical detection of now-publicly-known, adopted symbols of visibility. The state's logic sees any kind of queer representation in public as a threat to the heteropatriarchy and family morals due to their contagious dispositions. It is working to erase them from the surface to sanitize the public.

An artwork featuring rainbow flags submitted anonymously via an open call by a student collective, which incorporated an activist exhibition on campus related to ongoing demonstrations at Boğaziçi University, outraged the public sensibility. This anonymous poster with rainbow flags at the four corners depicted a mythical half-woman, half-snake creature (known as Shahmaran) on top of Islam's holiest site in Mecca, the Kaaba. Allegedly "insulting

the public values," the artwork, targeted as an "ugly attack," made it legitimate for the authorities to use disproportionate force on protesting students. Rainbow flags were seized during a police search of students' rooms, and students who organized the exhibitions were arrested. Catalyzing massive, angry protests inside and outside the campus, university resistance became a nationwide protest. While the protests are still going on around the country, each day, phobic public statements are being made by high officials: "LGBT perverts," "terrorists," "vandals," "LGBT? There's no such thing as LGBT+ people," "Let's not worry about what lesbians and mesbians say," and "This LGBT thing is something that doesn't suit our values, and that was introduced by the West. Do we have such things as LGBT in our past?" While I am writing this text in February 2021, "LGBTI" has become such a burning discussion for such a large public. Perhaps now, for the first time ever, the LGBTI community in Turkey is targeted as a criminal organization, a terrorist group, and the rainbow flag has become evidence of a crime—a symbol reduced to a volatile culture war marker now criminalized as an insulting image.

Dirty figures & Muddy colors

The exhibition, *A Finger for an Eye*, is born out of an urge to generate aesthetic reactions to the state's ongoing repression politics against Turkey's queer existences through the visual realm. It is as suffocating as it is intriguing to witness how the state

power's paranoid acts of aggression are more and more directed on the queer through its visual, representative, and symbolic forms; and how the state mechanisms ambitiously work in an iconoclastic fashion against the images of the queer. As the most salient *abstracted icon* of politicized queers for Turkey's new authorities, the rainbow colors have been the most targetable. It is more visible and identifiable now for a broad section of the public. Not only a flag with seven colors, a pink flamingo also became a censored image, a unicorn is a gay propaganda.

Acknowledging that these attacks of the state are tangible, beyond aesthetics, felt on our flesh, body, soul, and psyches, the exhibition of which, as a format is inherently linked to the questions of visibilities, is initially an invitation to subvert the attacks on the visual and an emergency call to feel and investigate the area beyond the visible and before invisible. Following the theoretical path of many, who suggest queer as a site beyond representation and intelligibility, the apprehension of what has not yet been articulated and only visible on the horizon and something which is always in becoming, the exhibition investigates the potential between activism's intrinsic politics of visibility and art's ways of hiding. While the schizoid authority is fixated on misinterpreting the symbols, targeting forms, misleading the colors, misidentifying the indexes with the killing motivation of sanitizing the public surface from queer gems, there is a viral queer potential invisible to the eyes. But the rate of contagiousness is threateningly high, so they are right to be scared. *A Finger for an Eye* is a minuscule exploration of tactically un-indexical queer positions, gestures, forms, and images that cannot be targeted, censored, and visibly deciphered as perverted, illegal, and criminal.

A Finger for an Eye retaliates by not playing the same game, as the eyes of the power are already blind, and it proposes a fight with a non-indexical (middle) finger. The title also connotes an expression in the Turkish language, (putting) a finger to a (blind) eye,¹ often used when "criticizing" a work of art that is too direct and obvious, which does not give any room for expansive decoding. When the artwork's message is also clear, it is a failure. It is putting the elephant in the room on a pedestal; that is how it is redundant. It is funny to hear this expression frequently, which implies Turkey's consensus that good art is the one that hides perfectly. Put differ-

ently—art —one way or another, should involve a degree of abstraction. The more, the better. Does this also come with an unconscious imperative of detaching art (which should be thickly layered and impenetrable, but also very porous for that specific reason) from life (which is direct, bitter, fraught with *straight-forwardness* and unpleasant realities)? Is it because we put on art, in its abstracted perfection, the responsibility of being a site or evidence of a utopia, where things should not break down to our usual concepts, tools, and views but always offer something untranslatable? Alternatively, did we internalize hiding so much that the art should not be something but a safe space where entry is limited and coded?

This exhibition, while it was still a purely rhetorical question sent to the universes of the invited artists for the first time, had a purpose in itself to radically limit the artists and to give them strict instructions by way of imitating the oppressor, impersonating the censors, and by calling for artists to adopt the strategies of oppression, to appropriate them to create new visual signifiers that move and exist beyond despotism.

I mimicked the censor officer's voice, according to my authoritarian curatorial propositions sent to the artists in the email, in this exhibition:

there should be no color.
there should be no figure.

While the government attempts to ban all rainbow images and the alignment of the seven *natural* colors, my proposition was harsher than this, and what I asked from the artists was to avoid using any color. However, what does that mean? What is no color –black, white, or tones of gray? Or anything except "gay" colors? To not to fall into the trap of the modernist, serious, and racial binary of black and white, by visualizing the greyish muddy colors that emerged after mixing up all the rainbow colors onto one palette, the "no colors" started to translate as "no colors but muddy colors;" or as "no rainbow colors."

Although the color scale of the exhibited works dominantly conforms with the usage of black, white, and tones in between, confrontations were coming from the artists about my color ban. One of the most

¹ English interpretation of a Turkish saying:

"Kör Göze Parmak Sokmak."

intriguing negotiations between me (a so-called authority) and the artists (the rebels) emerged when two artists—Baha Gökem Yalın and the Istanbul Queer Art Collective (IQAC)—wanted to incorporate plants or flowers into their works. This shared gesture of both artists was a perfect example for dealing with the censorship on colors. In the end, how can one put a black band on a flower petal? We discussed whether we should pick colorless, almost dying, flowers and plants; we even thought to paint them in black or white. That would be outrageously violent, however, so we kept the *natural* as it is, in its own color.

When it comes to “no figure,” considering that queer politics is foremost the body politics, and every attack made to queer existence is an attack directly to the body, what I imply with “no figure” is a null adjective: “body.” If the body is abstracted, this will automatically mislead the addressee of the attack. When the body becomes a ghost or a point in the galaxy, whose power can be enough to put a bull’s-eye, or when the body’s limit is extended and encompasses the whole of space, who can ever know where the dart board is? Besides this tactical invisibility, not designating any body image in the exhibition as a possible representation of a queer body was a concise concern to not give a shape to queerness.

As a keen follower of Professor David Getsy, who generously accepted being one of my mentors for this exhibition, this “no figuration” dictum was directly influenced by his works.² David expounds his theses on queer abstraction and strategic usages of it as a resistance model to surveillance and scrutiny: a circumvention of reductionist visual consumption of legible forms, a capacity to see differently how forms and their contexts unfold; and an experience opening up new ways of relating to bodies, desires, and distinct forms of embodiment both for artists and viewers.² Following his theses, I approached two artists, **Baha Gökem Yalın** and **Dorian Sarı**, whose practices included specific modes of abstraction and nonfiguration and later to **Cansu Yıldırım** and the IQAC, who have been almost always dealing with the questions of visibility or bodily presence. Nevertheless, all the artists responded to me with oppositions and cracked the idea of pure abstraction. Some of them reactionarily used and visualized body parts (of themselves and others); some came up with

forms implying the body’s very presence and various shapes, whereas others created projects expecting bodily interaction.

Thinking beyond Cartesian split, and without considering art as a pure intellectual activity but taking every art as libidinally charged, bodily engagement is not a direct production of the artist’s body. It was vain to expect a work of art that does not bear the trace of a body. Regardless of the positions the artists’ propositions rightfully took by defying the ban on the body, they still took on their own formulations of abstraction, sometimes by accepting the censor and navigating within its limits and sometimes by creating universes loaded with multiple affects that can only exist in abstractions. The body is present in every work of the exhibition but always abstracted in a way that never makes it visible (aka targetable) and never pointing to one specific body but a multitude of bodies.

During the process, the most surprising thing to witness was to see how the four artists all connected in their mutual investment in objects, either with their abstracted functionalities or with their coded meanings, usages, and forms. In a couple of our discussions, we found ourselves questioning the following:

An object is a figure? O is it an abstraction? Let’s say, somewhere in between.

As David reminds queer abstraction, “like abstraction itself, are not (and need not to be) pure [is] not (and need not to be) pure,” and “there are degrees of hybridity between abstracting visual practices and representational ones.”³ With the works of the artists who “promiscuously and impurely” worked in abstraction, the exhibition becomes an abstraction of the idea of abstraction.

² David Getsy, “Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction,” *Queer* Getsy, “Ten Queer Theses,”

Abstraction (2019): 65–75.
65–75.

In my fixation on labeling the exhibition as “abstract,” there lies the artists’ active endeavor against representation and representative values. Even though the artworks, as the final products show in the exhibition, include a portion of representative features, withdrawal from those features is the dominant concern. There is foremost intention to delete the body, identity, and normative phenomenological appearance in this endeavor. Unlike conceptualization, which searches for the forms or sublimation of the ideas, abstraction, is, at its core, an act of violence with its inherent functions, which hide, filter, reduce, suppress, and even formalize. This act of violence directly corresponds to the idea of appropriating oppressive methods.

Abstraction’s implication on isolation was also a point of departure, as a highly relevant concept of the time. In English, when describing someone as abstracted, we say that she is distanced, immersed in thought, in a world of her own. In Turkish language, when we say someone is abstracted from something, we mean she is isolated. The exhibition, to subvert the individualist connotation, uses the term to connect those who cannot be connected otherwise. Besides the theoretical proposition to meet abstraction in survival mode, the exhibition also challenges the isolation in practice. *A Finger for an Eye* takes a necessary practical method of exhibition-making in and beyond the times of the pandemic: the artists in the exhibition were invited to produce artwork remotely because the majority of them are scattered across Europe in London, Amsterdam, Basel, and Istanbul. Although they conceived their projects in their studios, we produced them in Istanbul with the help of Protocinema and Poşe teams, as well as a comrade, Can Küçük. Even in a time of isolation, we found ways for ideas to travel and take forms and positions.

LOOK!

is probably the sound of the exhibition,

A Finger for an Eye (along with the potential of the sound of the bell). The moment you enter the apartment, the sound should be coming somewhere from the back of the space. It is **Dorian Sari’s** voice. In an infinite loop, it is a suggestion, an invitation, a demand, a call, an order, an alarm, a cry, a scream, a supplication, an orison. Look! An artist is someone who is expected to “point out” things to which society is thought or rendered to be blind; an artist is always the avant-garde standing before society and should be the mirror and reflect what is not visible to the eye. But what happens when the artist’s strength is not enough to keep the index finger standing anymore? What if the artist is not enough to point out? What if pointing out is not enough? What if pointing out turns into targeting? What happens if the pointed-out object is missing, hidden, invisible, gone, or omnipotent, everywhere, panoptic? What happens, then, to the act of pointing out? This sound is not pointing out something but itself; its locutor and interlocutor are ambivalent and so is the object that is being pointed out. This audio work is a willfully censored, reduced, cut-out version of Dorian’s video work in which he is looking into the camera and pointing out.

The original video work in question with this sound reciting “look” was first conceived for a group exhibition, entitled *Concerné-e-s*, at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum in Geneva, to be opened simultaneously with *A Finger for an Eye* in February 2021. The Red Cross Museum is an institution dedicated to documenting the history of 150 years of international “humanitarian action,” with collections ranging from prisoners’ objects to movement posters. Guided by the principle of “neutrality,” The Red Cross has been criticized both by the legitimacy of impartiality during the most violent conflicts (for some, Red Cross is perpetuating war by making it more tolerable⁵), and the factuality of this allegedly neutral position since its foundation in the 19th century. During the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), Ottoman authorities demanded a change to the red cross emblem with the pretext that the Christian symbol on the ambulances was wounding the feelings of the Muslim soldiers, and they got permission from the international committee to use the “red crescent” instead.⁶ Since then, the Ottoman Red Crescent continued to lead the way among the Muslim countries. Today, the Turkish Red

⁴ Jonathan Benthall, “The Red Cross and Red Crescent Jordan,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 2

⁵ Benthall, “The Red Cross,”

Movement and Islamic Societies, with Special Reference to (1997): 157 – 177.
157–177.

Crescent is known for perpetual public scandals, child abuses, money laundering, and homophobic hate speeches. Let us remember what the Chairman of the Red Crescent Society of Turkey tweeted in June 2020, on Pride Day:

We will not let you step on human dignity . . . We will protect nature and the mental health of our children. We'll fight against those who violate healthy creation, who make abnormal looks normal by using their power of communication and impose their pedophilic dreams cloaked as modernity on young minds.

To back him up, the Turkish president's communications director said on Twitter that

"LGBT propaganda poses a grave threat to freedom of speech. (...) We won't be silenced!"

It is no surprise anymore to see how the populist right has been manipulatively appropriating the oppressed's dialects. Is it possible for us to use their language to manipulate them? Probably not. However, we can manipulate too. In this work, Dorian does not use the oppressor's language but appropriates the oppression and radically cancels himself out from the video. Cutting his video work into two components and showing the video without sound in Geneva and the sound without the video in Istanbul, Dorian bridges two locations, two contexts, two positions, as if his index finger from Geneva reaches out to Istanbul, and his sound bounces back from here to there. Where to look? Who to look at? What does the Chairman of the Red Crescent Society of Turkey see when he looks? Moreover, how are we looking at each other?

Dorian is ghosting himself out, erasing his face, accepting censorship on the image but resisting with his unsilenceable sound, which is haunting the space, only to manipulate the censor. Obscuring the object of our gaze, which can also potentially be targeted, he is wriggling himself out of the ultimate responsibility of an artist to point out and mislead the aggressor by rendering the target invisible—while he still reminds us to

LOOK!
AND
WATCH
OUT!

You do not have to follow the instructions!

This is the title and overarching directive of the instruction-based performative installation of the **Istanbul Queer Art Collective**, which comprises two founding members: **Seda Ergül** and **Tuna Erdem**. The Collective defines its artistic strategy as “*aggressive visibility*,” and they perform dominantly with a bold bodily presence in drag. However, the idea behind inviting IQAC to this exhibition, which promotes neither aggressivity nor visibility, was to subvert these concepts and inspire the Collective to do experiments on aggressive invisibility or passive visibility. Put another way, Seda and Tuna, the firm believers and executors of what Renate Lorenz theorizes as “*radical drag*,” describe drag as something that works with—but does not reproduce—binaries of gender, body, and their expressions; for this exhibition, to bring about the absence of body, and try out another term coined by Renate this time, an abstract drag, which offers “*visualizations of bodies that show no human body*”⁶ at all and which instead

⁶ This absence refers both to the conceptual frame of the current restrictive conditions that require us to invite

exhibition, where any body figuration is discouraged, and to artists to participate remotely.

use objects, situations, or traces to refer to bodies.”⁷ IQAC, instead of presenting a body image without showing any body, employs mundane objects in drag, and calls out the exhibition-goers’ bodies to put their fingers on the queer sensual potentials that these objects promise in the movements while using them. By extending the strange strangeness to every object, the Collective gets “the queer objects.”⁸

The six consecutive performative directives, each accompanying one or multiple objects installed on a shelf along the corridor, invite the viewer (or participant, interlocutor, or partner) to compensate for the absence of a body in performance; however, as the title suggests, they also do not force the viewer to haptically engage with the present objects. While each instruction expects a satisfaction of the queer capacity, the objects are always already loaded, since, as the Collective brilliantly reminds, you do not have to execute it to fulfill. The performative (or anti-performative) implication of the title, the physical satisfaction that comes with following the instructions, repeating the actions, and discovering the libidinal movements latent in the objects’ banal utilities become transcendental and mental exercises of perversity. Thus, the sexual movements produced with objects and the performance become abstracted but not tamed.

The six sequences include a traditional front-desk bell, a dozen rusty carved silver spoons, a bowl full of ashes and cotton, dwarf basil and a ring, play dough, seven pastels in different tones of gray and blank papers, and a bottle of Turkish eau de cologne—a unique selection. The bell, as a potential tool for alarm and as a visual connotative of a breast, is positioned at the entrance, as it is widely found in hotel receptions and used “to immediately call someone who is always supposed to be there, and even if not by chance, should always be right around the corner.”⁹ It plays with the sound, object, and body and how these three interact together. The second score follows one of those traditional “practical tips for housewives,” which used to be given by newspapers and are now popular on the internet—the viewer is expected to polish the rusty spoons by rubbing them with ash. This old-fashioned, alchemy-like action of rubbing two dirty, unlikely, gray materials against each other creates shiny silver, rising from the ashes. Even though it

is likely and desirable that a viewer who attempts to execute this alchemy will end up with dirty hands, the very gesture and the idea of directly creating a shining gray fusion out of discolored grays speaks to the exhibition’s premise: coming together and turning gray into something shiny. A similar reaction happens between the viewer’s hands and the basil you need to touch; this time, a caress promises a fresh smell, both in the air and on the fingers. With the play dough and accompanying instruction, the artists advise the viewer to perform the act of kneading *çig köfte* (literally translated as a raw meatball), which requires a special repetitive gesture, bodily evoking a movement like milking or a *handjob* (Lubunca is a secretive queer language widely used among queers in Turkey; *köftelemek* is translated as meatballing and means “handjob”), which at the end would create a jagged phallic form. With the pastel with seven gray shades, the Collective asks the viewer to draw a rainbow that will ultimately lack its usual colors but is still not monochrome, still not unimaginable, and still dirtying the hands. Here, at the end of the actions, waits a very traditional object passing the best times of its lifetime. Here the viewers are expected to clean their hands, as they all should, and sanitize them after a series of invisibly sexual and potentially infectious movements. Here Seda and Tuna ask us to remember Müjde and Selin, two women from the 80s. This instruction gives reference to a TV commercial from the 1980s starring the actress Müjde Ar, an iconic face and body for sexually liberated women, made for a cologne brand of the time, Fuar *Kolonya*, which does not exist anymore. In the commercial, the overly sexualized body of Müjde Ar, rising from the sea’s wild waves, runs to the camera, her breasts bouncing, and reaches for the cologne bottle. TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) banned the commercial, finding **the eyes** of Müjde too obscene for public morals, and this incident precipitated the bankruptcy of the brand. In the collective remembrance of Tuna and Seda, however, the commercial was a bit different; the commercial was not for Fuar cologne but for Selin cologne, another and still existing popular cologne brand that takes its name from a female name. Coupling Müjde and Selin, the Collective gives a queer rereading of the commercial from the 80s and a queer sexual perspective to the cologne.

⁷ Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory*, vol. 2

⁸ Timothy Morton, “Queer Objects,”

<http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.ca>

⁹ Istanbul Queer Art Collective, online

(London: Transcript Verlag, 2014).

Ecology Without Nature (blog), March 15, 2011, 2011/03/queer-objects.html/.

conversation with author, November 2020.



Beyond the abstracted sexual engagement the objects offer, which are all highly coded with personal, historical, and cultural meanings, as well as linguistic ones (the artists are also interested in the libidinal economy surfaces, with the utterance or the mind-images of the names given to those objects and the verbs translating the interactions with objects in the Turkish language). This performative installation work, as a constellation, urges us to rethink the time we are living in.

The current pandemic, which sharpens the vulnerabilities and inequalities, has posed vital challenges to Turkey's queer subjects and beyond. Like Turkey, many anti-queer states have been using the crisis as an opportunity to discipline the so-called deviances. Besides, in a more general sense, it is frightening to see how the ongoing regulations against pandemics worldwide are based on generalized assumptions and standardized notions of a household, a family, an intimate relationship, and others. It is surprising to see, for example, how regulatory forces want to think that all people are monogamous or in heteronormative, monogamous relationships. From a bigger picture, we live in a time where sex outside the limits of monogamy is forbidden worldwide. It indeed reminds us of the first years of another pandemic.

You Do Not Have to Follow the Instructions! has missing instructions, according to Tuna and Seda, which should say "Read Derek Jarman's *At Your Own Risk!*" Despite stretching the limits of their work's visibility in the exhibition, the Istanbul Queer Art Collective keeps its "aggressive" tenure. By inviting

the viewers to take a risk and **TOUCH** in the time of distancing and isolation, with no body interaction, they willfully provoke the viewer to think about the risk, responsibility, and care during the AIDS pandemic, of which it took years for the governments to respond finally—with YEARS of silence, death, and uncertainty, and also self-organized care, shared responsibility, and negotiated risk. Furthermore, the AIDS pandemic is not over; no one has found a vaccination or a cure for it.

You Do Not Have to Follow the Instructions! without forcing anyone to interact with potentially infectious objects, and to acknowledge and experiment with the mental abstractions of the instructions, still creates a "dangerous" site, within which how you engage is

AT YOUR OWN RISK!

Translation as abstraction

The silent screen welcomes us to the first room and to its cryptic universe. This is the work of **Baha Gökem Yalım**, an artist who refuses to crystallize media in a particular form and radically allows things to appear as themselves, present here in the form of a moving image, both an active process and outcome of a work of translation. In their practice, the range of subjects they touch upon varies; however, some notions appear, such as the poetically charged vertical/horizon allegory, which functions as an oblique critique on modernity and patriarchy. Their work is often accompanied by text that crosses poetry, fiction, and academic reflection lines. For the exhibition, Gökem began with a poem they wrote, "Remembrance's Stench," an intimate and vivid text that can be read as a poetic montage of their early memories, and then as searching for another system of communication beyond the scheme

of verbal language. Görkem also transformed their text into a hand choreography.

“Remembrance’s Stench” is a text. But how to read this text? It is a text that does not want to be read. While the act of translation still has the intention to disseminate the knowledge, the story, and the affect, to translate is to exercise power and control over what should and should not be included in a translated work. For Benjamin, the “receiver” of translation does not designate but is a fuzzy concept; every “translation” is the “coming to terms with” the foreignness of types of communication.¹⁰ Taking the space of *untranslatable* as “queer space,” a disruptive zone of encounter “between source and target languages, one that challenges any normative idea of straightforward, untroubled translatability,” Görkem’s act of translation is an encounter with a (textual) body that they created, that is yet to come into existence only in the act of translation.¹¹

In the form of an abstraction that doubled the strain of and ontologically intertwined with translation, in the words at hand, Görkem’s (self) translation willfully controls their own text and limits both the textual body and the audience/reader. We have no given clue nor context about the original version of the poem, but in the artist’s act of not offering the original text to help and to comfort the reader who strives to decipher, there is an underlying message. The question of the centuries: Whose stories are being told? Whose language is being spoken? And its derivatives: Whose desire and pain should be uttered in abstraction? Whose words should be turned into actions? Görkem invites us to take steps out of communicative ways of power and to generate new corporal ones. We are kindly and silently asked to learn their language, the language of the hands, the language of the unsaid and repressed. And it starts with a fundamental instruction: *LOOK!*—with tactile eyes and fingers, if possible. Besides the unspeakable text and the loss it carries, “Remembrance’s Stench” is also a proposition of a methodology. A practical video, a cookbook of abstraction, an introduction to the language of hands.

As a supreme method of abstraction, in this work of translation, Görkem turned symbolic to gestures,

and, by doing so, they reconnect the intellect to the body—two entities that have continuously been forced to be split as a genesis of binary thinking. However, even though the text does not lose its poetical power in its transference to the hands, abstracting a legible and accessible form to another one to make it less legible and accessible could only happen with a degree of violence, which entails a certain loss. With the hands of the artists embodying and reciting the poetic text, the video is simultaneously telling the story of what is lost on the way.

This loss is being crystallized on the video’s immobile background in front of which we see the artist’s hand dancing the poetry. This is a damaged version of *The Threatened Swan* (Dutch: *De bedreigde zwaan*), an oil painting of a mute swan made around 1650 by Jan Asselijn, a Dutch Golden Age painter with a withered hand. The painting’s subject, a life-size swan, is defending its nest against a dog that is not painted in life-size and only visible at the far-left corner of the painting with its small head, which creates a visual imbalance between the sizes of the aggressor and the retaliator and accentuates the defensive rage of the latter. The swan, with its trans-human capacity, as in *Swan Lake*, in which Odette is a princess at night and a swan during the day, with its sexualization in many depictions in the 15th and 16th centuries, when it was considered more acceptable to depict a woman in the act of copulation with a swan than with a human. With their fame as one of many bird species that form same-sex partnerships, swans are already queer animals.¹² Görkem, by cutting out the subject of the threatened swan, willfully censors the queer image, but, by taking the dog also out of the picture, they cancel out the fight, attack, and threat altogether; they leave us with the serenity of a colorful sky but also the trace of the violence that still dominates the screen with a threatening blank.

Among the participants of the exhibition, Görkem was the one who transgressed my curatorial boundaries. The video leaves out the swan figure, and it foregrounds its absence in the background; it employs the hands, which is also acceptable considering its nonindexical character in terms of gender and sexuality and the exhibition’s suggestion

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, New York:

¹¹ William J. Spurlin, ‘Introduction: The Gender and Queer Literature Studies 51,

¹² Please check this new weirdly heartwarming and Austria Attacked Humans to Protect Their Adopted Baby: <https://www.sciencealert.com/gay-swans-austria-attacked-people>

Schocken Books, 1968, p. 69.

Politics of Translation: New Approaches’, *Comparative* no. 2 (2014): 201–214.

wrenching news from 2018: Peter Dockrill, “Gay Swans in A Plastic Cup,” *Science Alert*, June 27, 2018.

—protect-adopted-baby-plastic-cup-homosexual-animals

of them as the tactile weapon in the fight against oppressors. Nevertheless, Görkem's usage of colors was a major concern for me because of the exhibition's totality. Despite my insistence, they always persuaded me with their answers. For Görkem, it would be outrageous, and it would be too violent to discolor the colors if they are already given, especially if they are natural and if Görkem himself did not produce them.

It was particularly important to keep the sky with the original colors as Jan Asselijn painted it. As a painter who mastered painting in Italy—which would influence his painting for the rest of his life—Jan's paintings always bear the colors he experienced in Italy; he would use Italy's warm colors, even when depicting Amsterdam's cold skies. Carrying the colors in his head, mimicking the skies that are believed to be the same in anywhere in the world, is a sanguine gesture of Jan, from which we all can learn much. How to see the colors in the sky when it is dark? How to store the colors and use them when an opportunity arises? How to imagine another sky?

A support structure: a monument for the unfound

The screen showing the Remembrance's Stench felt like it is larger than the room and heavier than it can carry. This feeling is also valid for Baha Görkem Yalın's second work in the exhibition, *A Monument for the Unfound*, which is situated in the same room. Just like the life-size swan of the *Threatened Swan*, these two works create a sense of disorientation in the space. A mistake. A wrongly decorated room. Objects that do not fit in that cannot be specific or relevant to the site. Aliens.

A Monument for the Unfound is an installation, a ritual record that does not disclose its *raison d'être*. Just like the *Remembrance's Stench*, it does not provide a set of hints to the viewer, who is left alone to enjoy and dig into the conundrum. Suggesting that ana-

lyzing or "making sense of something is only one (not the best nor ideal) way of the establishing relationships"¹³ with an artwork, the opacity, untranslatability, and unintelligibility embodied in this form generates a strange potential for queering the space—and a moment of encounter with the work itself. This queer potential renders the encounter pregnant with possibilities.

A Monument for the Unfound is a floating monument with no feet on the ground, unoriginated and unfounded. In contrast to bulky guise, it is almost mobile, always ready to run. As a recurring concern in Görkem's practice, the structure's support manifests itself in this assembly of objects interconnected to each other. The components of the installation, the backdrop tripod, a baby carriage, a column, the flowers, the aluminum that wraps the flowers, and even the ceiling and the floor, abstracted from their utilities and representative qualities, start to hold and support each other to form a hard stable assemblage.

The curious system of support that enables each object to hold on to and carry each other can set a model for us to think about our communal structures of support. How do we support each other? What are the junctions that enable us to form an assembly? How do we hold together? How tightly do we hold? How straight? How would it be possible to hold it queerly? From another angle, these junctures are also the boundaries, the most fragile points, and our vulnerabilities' contours. Therefore, just like abstraction, support as structure also carries an inherent form of violence. How do we press onto each other? How do we step onto others?

The backdrop stand tripod does not hold an illusionary green curtain, and the baby carriage is not carrying a baby. The body, or many bodies, is not turned into an allegory but an abstracted form in a groundless column, a nonmysterious monolith, a broken obelisk, while forming a monument for nothing but itself, its unfoundedness. For me, this is a monument for the new generations, young minds, the futures of the society on whom the queers are thought to be the bad influences only by their existences, as a common argument of conservatives worldwide. It is a monument to an "abstract sex"¹⁴

¹³ From online conversation with

¹⁴ For Travis Jeppesen, "fucking is also abstraction. All forms of intent." from Jeppesen, Travis, 'Queer Abstraction (Or How to Mousse Magazine 66 (Winter 2019): jeppesen-2019).

Baha Görkem Yalın, January

non-Catholic fucking, fucking without a purely procreative Be a Pervert with No Body). Some Notes Toward a Probability', <http://moussmagazine.it/queer-abstraction-travis->

“unproductive futurism,”¹⁵ and a block squeezing “the fascism of the baby’s face.”¹⁶

Remember how the Turkish government had been using the fascism of the baby’s face in the last year: local education leaders forbade children to draw rainbows, arguing that it was a ploy to turn children gay. Two series in Netflix Turkey with two gay supporting characters in their scripts were censored or canceled. A textile giant in Turkey banned the use of rainbows, unicorns, and other symbols in its clothing because “themes that can create an LGBT perception must be avoided.” Turkey’s Trade Ministry mandated that any LGBT+ pride and rainbow-themed merchandise can only be sold to consumers over the age of 18, on the grounds that rainbow pride products could have negative effects on children’s growth.

Forms of oppression: whistle, (you, me, inside, outside), me, me, me, me, me

In his multiple narratives, which often take the form of sculptures, videos, and performances, **Dorian Sari** employs practices close to rituals to show exposed, subjected, or resistant bodies to coercion.¹⁷ Despite his emotionally charged minimalistic sculptural works that executed a good portion of abstraction, he uses human bodies (mostly his own) to impersonate collectives or collectivities rather than focusing on a single individual and her experience. While he erases his body figure from the video titled *Look!* and reduces himself to a mere sound, the sculptures he offered for the exhibition strangely bring the body back to the picture, even when the body is not there. During our conversations and negotiations prior to the exhibition, each time I asked for a non-figuration, he came up with a figure that called for a body. These figures were objects either mimicking the body’s absence or bearing the trace of it. The objects that Dorian created, unlike the objects of Istanbul Queer Art Collective, have no utilitari-

an function; they do not ask for engagement alike, however, they both expose potentials of objects in their own way. Again, unlike the Collective’s constellation of raw ready-mades, Dorian transformed his objects in a way that they become forms of oppression, with the components and gestures added to the objects. These abstracted forms of oppression, in the very process of abstraction, lose their indexical, easily identifiable, and legible positions and create an ambivalence between oppressor and oppressed, as another method to trick the power. These forms of oppression thus allude both to the acts of oppressing and the states of being oppressed in a cunning twist.

Installed, almost hidden, there is a tiny black whistle at the far corner of the room. It is a double bind object, both an instrument to alert and to regulate, and essential for opposing parties: it can be used by police on the mouth of one, while on the other it calls for emergency when a scream is not enough. In the same manner as this ambiguity, the mouth of the whistle is melted, suggesting both the anger, order, subjugation of the oppressor and the anger, revolt, and cry of the fighter. The whistle has become useless for both sides, the sound is inaudible, and the caustic word is hardened and solidified.

Squeezed inside of the bay window, there lies a big black creature. A balloon that cannot fly because of its weight. Bay windows, a window space projecting outward from the main walls of a building and forming a bay in a room, creates a spatial extension of a home. Formally it blurs the idea of the outside and inside and expands the limit of the private space by penetrating the public one. Unusually immobile balloons are also a threshold between the inside and outside, the limit and the balance of the air. Just like the whistle, it also proposes two opposing apparitions. It is the skin swollen up with the repressed desires, the anger, which is about to explode, the movement larger than its vessel, waiting at the threshold of the home and the street to break free from the prohibited internal colors and spread them out. It is also the bomb thrown from outside into the private space, fraught with fear, bigotry, prohibition, and violence—and which is also on the verge of exploding and dominating the intimate space with

¹⁵ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*,

¹⁶ “The fascism of the baby’s face” subjects us to its that is, in its radical form as reproductive futurism), whatever Edelman, *No future:*

¹⁷ From the press release of the artist’s exhibition, *La Parade* Paris,

Duke University Press, 2004.

sovereign authority as the figure of politics itself (of politics, the face a particular politics gives that baby to wear . . .” from *Queer theory.*

de l’aveuglement (The Parade of Blindness) at the Centre 2020.

its inherent darkness.

The belt, as an exception, has nothing to do with the idea of liberation, it is only about security and control. It holds up clothing and locks up genitalia. It is a weapon of corporal punishment; with its immediate availability for use, it is a convenient disciplinary tool; with its strength and lightness, it can produce intense pain on flesh. However, Dorian, this time, plays with the object to obscure its potential by giving it a shape. Does this belt mimic the disproportionate and schizoid act of control, which is even attacking the air, the ghost, the invisible to grip it? Or does this belt show the impotency of the politics of control, which fail to function when their subject is evaporated, diffused into the universe?

Disturbingly palpable, yet an invisible blank

Cansu Yıldırım is a photographer working largely with portraits, mostly by centering her subject, capturing the moment while looking into the eyes of the people who are looking back at her. She creates “intimate portraits with candid personal reportage, landscape, nature, still life and performative works;”¹⁸ she blends “confessional, relational introspectiveness” with the “spontaneity and anarchist sense of transgression.”¹⁹ Always in real life, her portraits do not bear the gaze of an outsider but go after “an exploration, looking for a sense of belonging” while pushing against the boundaries of an identity. After her series, *Shelter* (2018), in which she explored and documented the safe spaces of herself with the photographs of “marginal” others, she started to question the package within her photographs being published and consumed in the Western world. Even though she was capturing more the queer moments of joy than the teardrops on the drag queens’ cheeks, the world beyond Turkey was interested in seeing the pain and misery in her portraits. Deciding not to be an accomplice to it, in her latest series *Fathom* (2020), she works on the deeper experience of queerness, “assuming that the rush to talk about being queer in a region like Turkey, is only the surface.”²⁰ This was also a moment of reflection for her to decide if she wanted to put on a photojour-

nalist jacket or not.

We started our conversation for the exhibition right after she finished her *Fathom* project, where she investigates the queer in a dreamland, as bodies without spaces, creatures, nonexistent characters, the strange mutants that do not fit in. She is an artist I approached to challenge her practice in documenting individuals through visible portraits, codable bodies, and identifiable faces. Accepting the experiment on the willful censorship that I dictate, she offers a selection of photographs in wide-ranging subjects and dates, but what brings these images together is her usages of light, which do not support the sight this time but obscure the image and identities with its omnipotence. To appropriate the manipulative techniques of power, she applied aftereffects to fade the light in and fade the photograph’s subject out for some shots. In a way, she sat on the oppressor’s editing table and violated her own images. For some other photographs, she did not need to cut the image with an external light; with the help of blowing out the flash or the spot or the electric torch, she crossed out her photographic subjects with overexposure.

Cansu’s intervention purports to be the light of the violence: the blinding light of the scrutiny, one that does not come from the gaze of the photographer nor the subject, but from the inspector. As the spectators, we see a dominant light in each photograph in the series, but this is not the writing (*graph*) of the light (*photo*), but the writing of oppression. This writing of oppression is what impedes us precisely from seeing clearly what we rightfully should see. This impenetrable light causes no acknowledged contact between the subjects and us, the viewers. Our sight lines cannot coincide.

The block of the gaze, because of the “willful” censor, is brilliantly manifested at most in the photograph, showing the back of a person who opens their buttocks and rebelliously lays bare the holes rendered intimate in our society. Going against the will of the subject’s intentional act of showing off and enjoying their body, Yıldırım puts a dazzling spot of light, a shining sun on top of the holes—the eyes. By not revealing the eye of the vagina and rectum, the artist castrates the image, hindering both the spectator’s gaze and the photographic

¹⁸ Tom Seymour, ‘Give Me Shelter’, published in <https://www.1854.photography/>

¹⁹ Seymour,

²⁰ From the artist’s statement

1854, July 30, 2019,
2019/07/give-me-shelter/
‘Give Me Shelter’
on the TAPA exhibition catalogue.

image. Losing the intimidating effect of showing black holes to the public, the image became a failed protest, but through this failed protest, she reminds us of the censorship's origin.

In her exercise between excessive light and intimidating dark, between black and white, Cansu tackles the hypervisibility of queer subjects, who are scrutinized but not recognized. She took the photographs of those who are in the state of dazzling and shining while practicing with the raw and scrutinizing light of an inspector. In some of the shots, the bodies and their parts are clearly and subversively visible, although it is impossible to put a face on any of the people she focuses on. In others, she directs the nonanimated objects, rendering them not so easily intelligible or identifiable. Cansu uses animate and nonanimated objects to question our precipitation to name things. Is this a streetlamp? A banner? A street sign? Or is this a clown? A drag? A man? What does the lollipop banner say? Is this an apple? Is this a reference to original sin? Is this the ass of a woman? Or that of a man?

works

Instead of a blueprint or a black strip, she censors her photographs with light. This censor with over-exposure functions as a double bind; it appropriates the eyes of the oppressor who is to scrutinize but is too blind to see. However, it is also employed strategically by the artist to make her photographic subjects untargetable. The photograph showing a group of people standing was taken recently, on February 1, 2021, during the first protest outside of the campus, a day after the students' arrest over the "insulting artwork." As a general practice in the series, Cansu, here as well, does not show the faces but a moment of resistant collectivity, an indivisible group of individuals. She also renders the image itself to an ambiguous, unintelligible state. On the first blink, one thinks that this photo could also have been taken during a street party, a celebration, or any gathering because we do not see flags or banners or police and violence. While she marks the violence of the days we are in, she leaves the possibility open to imagine a future where protests become celebrations.

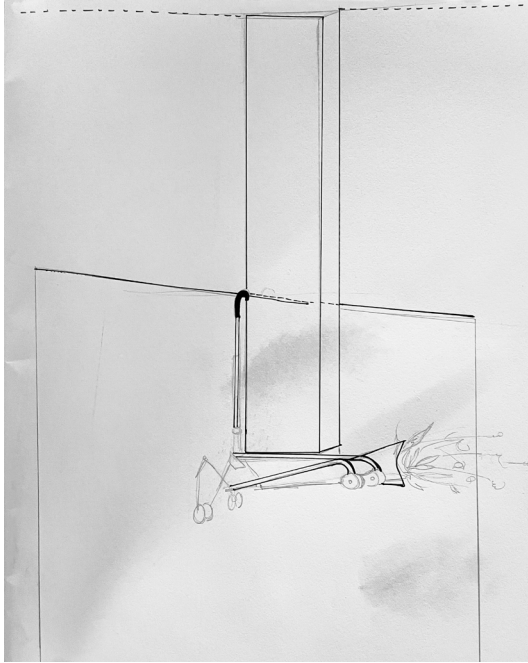
alper turan
february 2021



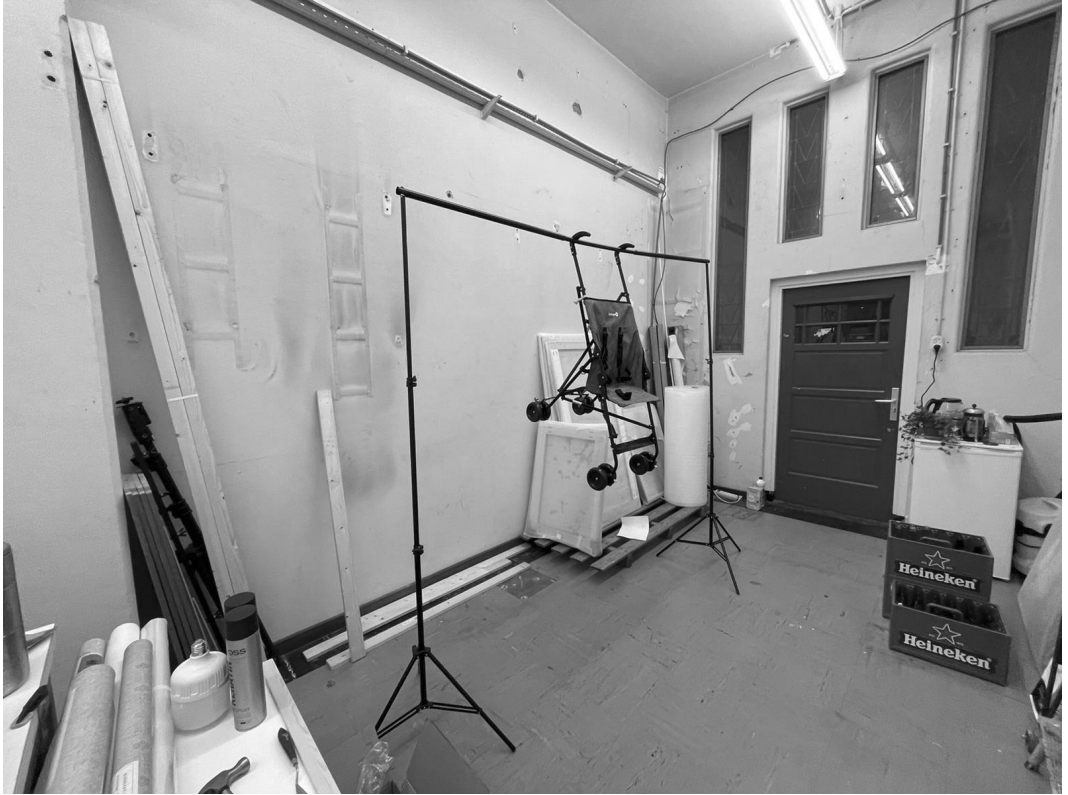
baha görkem yalım
remembrance's stench, 2021
single channel colour video without sound, in loop
44' 47"



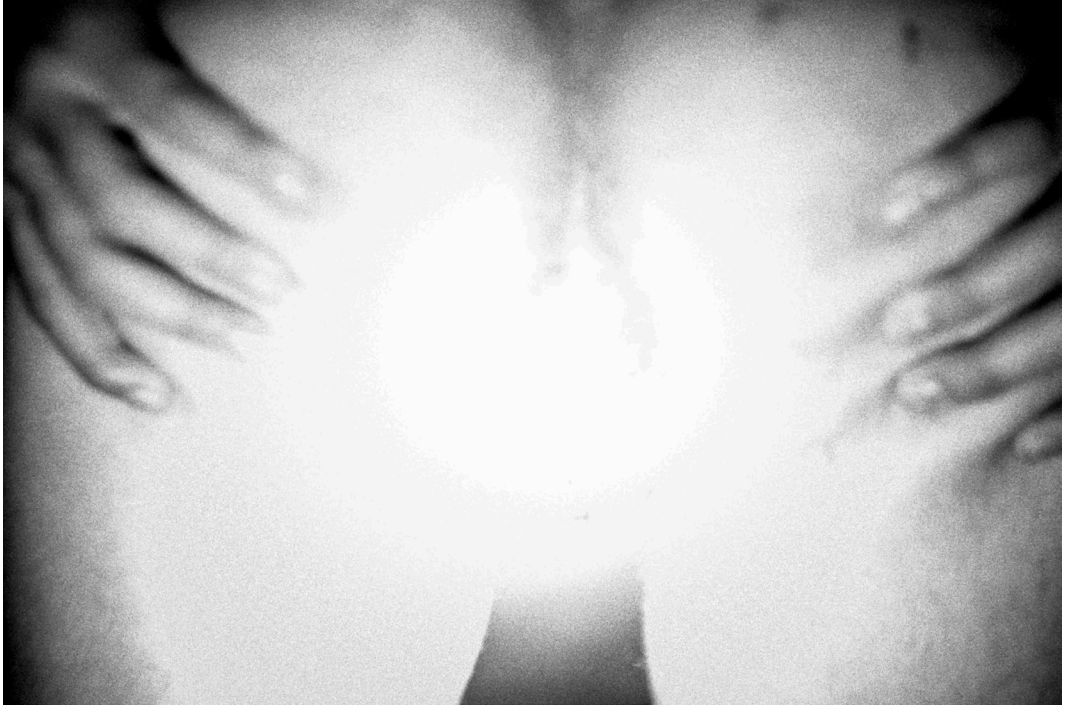
baha görkem yalım
remembrance's stench, 2021
single channel colour video without sound, in loop
44' 47"



baha görkem yalım
a monument for the unfound, 2021
tripod system, stroller, plaster, aluminium,
flower arrangement
multi dimensional



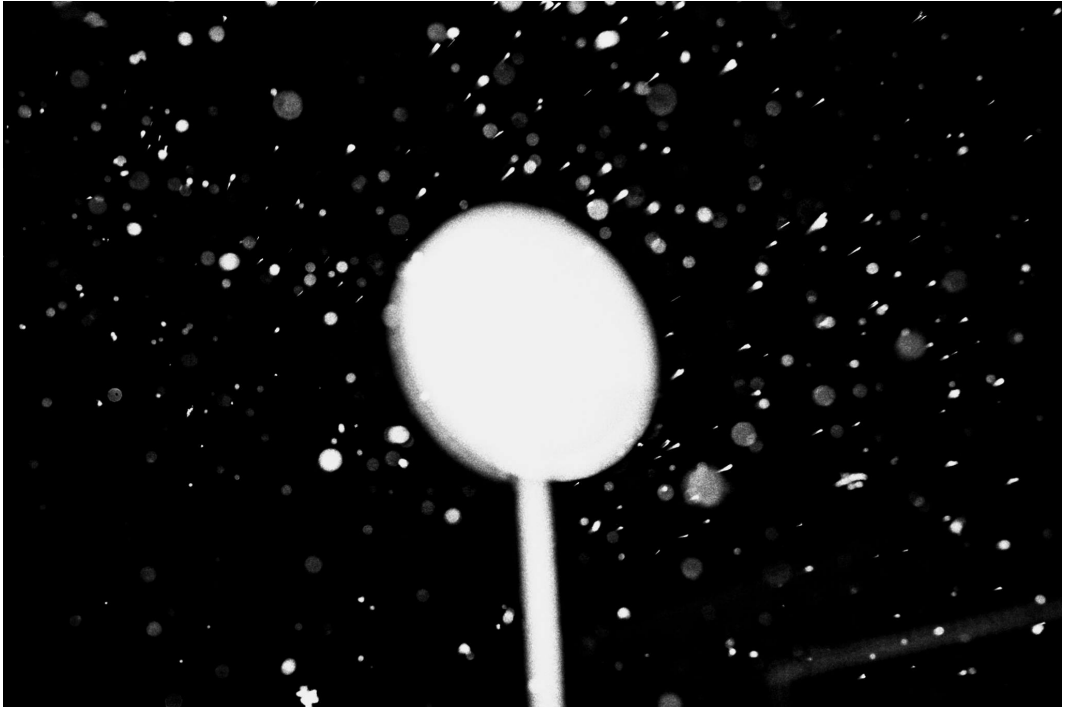
baha görkem yalim
a monument for the unfound, 2021
tripod system, stroller, plaster, aluminium,
flower arrangement
multi dimensional



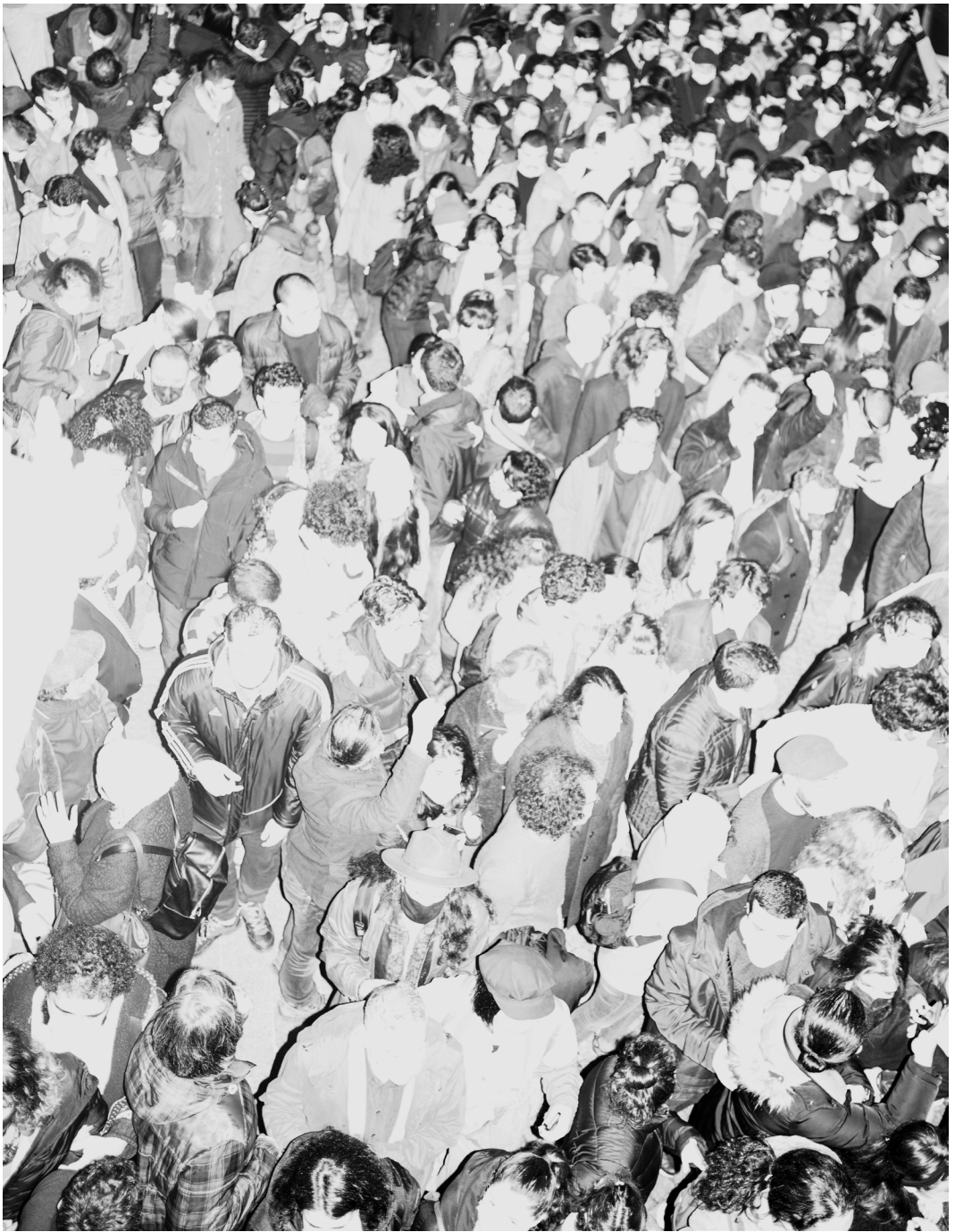
cansu yıldıran
from the series *fallacy*, 2021
fine art print photograph
30 x 20 cm



cansu yıldırım
from the series *fallacy*, 2021
fine art photograph
30 x 20 cm



cansu yıldıran
from the series *fallacy*, 2021
foil print photograph
120 x 80 cm



cansu yıldiran
from the series *fallacy*, 2021
foil print photograph
178 x 140 cm



dorian sari
untitled, 2020
whistle
4 x 2 x 1.5 cm



dorian sari
untitled (you, me, inside, outside), 2020
belt
multi dimensional
(3 pieces)



dorian sari
look, 2020
sound of video in loop
3'30"



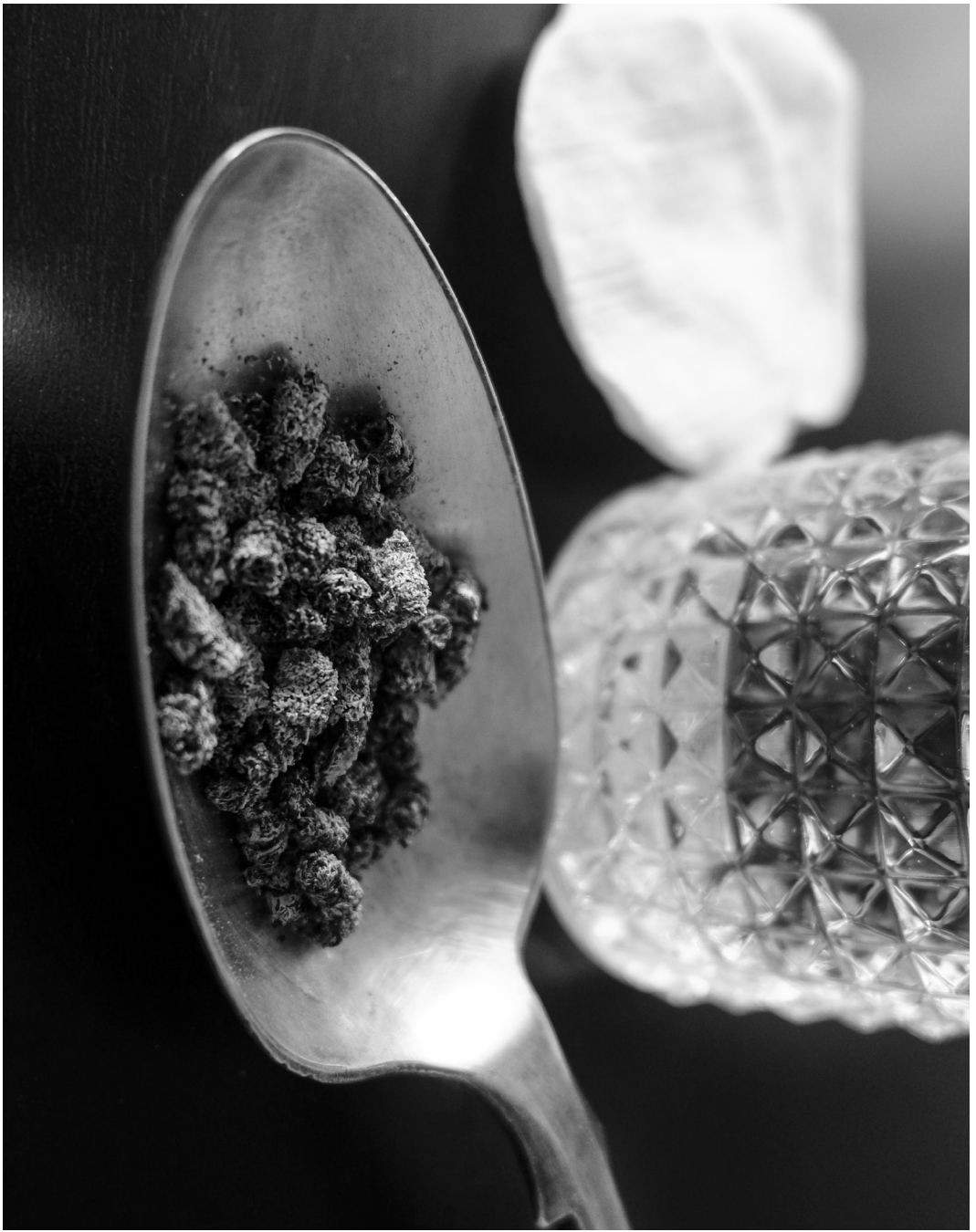
dorian sari
me, me, me, me, 2020
baloon
multi dimensional

photo credit: jonas haenggi



istanbul queer art collective
you do not have to follow the instructions, 2021
6 performance instructions
and mixed medium installation

photo credit: eda sancakdar



istanbul queer art collective
you do not have to follow the instructions, 2021
6 performance instructions
and mixed medium installation

photo credit: eda sancakdar

Ring the bell.

Polish one of the spoons.

Pat the dwarf basil.

Squeeze the dough into patties.

Draw a rainbow.

*While disinfecting your hands,
imagine Selin and Mijde,
two women from the 80s.*



istanbul queer art collective
you do not have to follow the instructions, 2021
6 performance instructions
and mixed medium installation

photo credit: suzan özel

Baha G rkem Yalim, <http://bahagorkemyalim.com/>;
Cansu Yildiran, <https://www.cansuyildiran.com/>
Dorian Sari, <https://www.doriansari.co/>;
Istanbul Queer Art Collective,
<https://www.istanbulqueerartcollective.co.uk/bio>

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Protocinema is a cross-cultural, mission driven art organization, commissioning and presenting site-aware art in Istanbul, New York and elsewhere. We produce context-specific projects of the highest artistic quality that are accessible to everyone. Protocinema evokes empathy towards understanding of difference, across regions through exhibitions, educational public programming and mentorship. Protocinema maintains long-term relationships with artists nurturing sustained growth. Founded by Mari Spirito in 2011, Protocinema is a registered 501(c)3, free of 'brick and mortar', sites vary to respond both to global concerns and changing conditions on the ground. protocinema.org

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