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Deniz Soezen is an artist who interrogates the way in which she negotiates a position of excess and refusal out of the assumptions of identity in a multicultural society. Her work is complex and doesn't offer easy answers but keeps the viewer guessing, often not certain who they are dealing with in the work.

But what is at stake in uncertainty, why fox the viewer in this way? Sara Ahmed in her book *Strange Encounter: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, posits that the figure of the stranger is always already known and is given specific attributes in discourse of making the Other; citing Neighborhood Watch schemes that makes strange 'the loiterer' for example. Ahmed continues, that nationhood is produced through the differentiation between what is familiar and strange, therefore the proximity of strangers within the nation state is crucial to the production of national selfhood. In short, to have a sense of belonging, we (in all our manifestations of community), need strangers amongst us to make us feel a sense of belonging: in the case of the hegemony this would be to the nation state. In the light of this I would argue that for a progressive view on Otherness there has to be a radical break with the idea of the visual determining difference so that vision is un-equatable with knowledge. In too many instances the visual is still the over determined marker of identity and the site of knowledge and containment both in the multicultural debates as well as in racist accusations. Doubt in the visual, is therefore an important counter to bigotry. Furthermore, by bringing both the visual and the textual into

collision, the certainty of the viewer as to who the subject is, can be undermined. Work that refuses the visual subject and asks questions about who we think we are looking at can do some work to insert that doubt. And with doubt perhaps the borders of "us" and "them" or friend and stranger can be eroded.

This is what Deniz does. She inserts doubt through a range of devices. Often, in the videos, the voice is mutated, or there are several voices speaking, without direct references or any clear indication from the images who is talking. The viewer can only guess at what anyone looks like or use their own imagined people to fill in the gaps, thus any stereotype is of the viewers own making and the disjunctions in the work generally help to make the viewer aware of this.

For example, in "My visit of Azizye mosque" the video opens with a photograph of a building. The narrator tells us that she is visiting a mosque. It is thus implied that the image is of a mosque covered with 'industrially fabricated tiles, which depict traditional Turkish tile design' and that it is situated in Stoke Newington. Despite this certainty in the telling the visual evidence is of a photo of the Astra cinema showing a Bruce Lee film that signals a time other than the present (with no tiles to be seen) as do the clothes of the bystanders in the photo. The protagonist then plays more with the viewer: a chance encounter is described that seems to serve no purpose. The bystanders in the image that we are still looking at, are mirrored by

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that chance encounter with passers-by in the garage opposite. However, whereas the bystanders are all wearing “Western” clothes, the passers-by we hear about are described as wearing black headscarves. In the collapse of time between the narrative and the visual, subjectivity is all. Initially authenticity is emphasized through the narrator’s disclosure of her father’s origin to the women in the car, those “wearing black headscarves”, itself a different signal to authenticity, telling them that she was interested in Islamic arts. This seeming innocent encounter, though, is undermined through an erotic dream that makes explicit the desire that charges through ethnic insiderism. The narrator dreams about the veiled woman and has an erotic dream.

Deniz aka Suzan Dennis, the narrator is split in her desire for her exotic other, who is more visibly other, more present in difference than she, from the narration, can be assumed to be and in the erotic encounter we are invited to revise our image of the narrator’s voice as itself erotic.

And so a merging of private and public: the secret desire and the public longing for wholeness that is never to be, a longing that is shot through diasporic art and writing for an impossible home. The narrative that fans out into multiple echoes and the different languages, Turkish and English, signal a turn away from the singular, certain subject that knows who they are and who knows where they are from. In the multiple languages and the mistranslations such easy notions of self and origin do not exist.

In the work of Deniz Soezen, *Home Stories*, each vignette, relies on the absurdity of global cultural flux for example in *Pitfield Street*, the narrator describes that Doener Kebabs are sold in China as a German delicacy. The second sequence however is of a woman, the artist, dressed up as a generic, could be Chinese or Japanese, woman, dancing ritually but awkwardly in a London Kebab shop while everyone around is serving as normal. Into this absurd mix is again posed the question of ‘Where are you from’ and the narrators refusal to answer. This piece doesn’t just use the voice of the artist but three different characters, all giving personal anecdotes in a range of languages. In the third section we have the fractured voice again telling an anecdote of being thrown off a bus due to a misunderstanding about how to buy a ticket. The story moves on to a rumination of the untranslatability of the term *inat* many examples are given of it’s meaning from dictionaries and academics that testify to the difficulty of living through another culture or language.

It is as Judith Butler says in ‘Undoing Gender’: Butler talks of undoing the self through the telling of a story, “where the very I who seeks to tell the story is stopped in the midst of the telling”. Deniz work produces gaps in the struggle to listen through multiple voices and through the different languages. Through it all we are undone and what we are told undermines what we see. The emphasis is on the experience rather than knowing. If the self is performed and not fixed then identity is not about origin or colour: we are formed

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through discourse, which is a sea of shifting valences. And yet, in this maelstrom, there is often no interpretive mechanism that mediates or contextualizes how subjectivity forms through it. In this instance the very agency that was curtailed through fixing is lost through a complete unfixing. Deniz work, however, does not lose us in the unfixed pick and mix of, say, Nikki S Lea who infiltrates many communities for a short time inserting herself as them for a while. By contrast her work is embedded in the culture of her lived experience. Deniz works with the dialectic of experience and interpretation that Miwon Kwon argues for. If we shift from the video work to the drawing, 'Deniz, Deniz and Deniz, (blond/ brunette/ dark-haired)' from 1987/88 for example, the viewer is again confronted with evidence and disjunction; tension between what we see and what we are told. These works operate as artworks and therefore as artifice: a childlike drawing of the fractured subject. Three Deniz in profile, three names, three Deniz from behind all drawn naively in felt tip pen. This drawing, in its multiple selves acknowledges the coercive nature of cultural norms of performativity in the everyday. It signals, on the one hand, the desire to choose for oneself what to look like, while on the other, it is a whimsical fashioning of "what ifs?" that children experiment with. There is an equality to all the selves of Deniz in this depiction that reminds us that children do not fix themselves: while at the same time reminding us of hegemonic norms that prevail through representation.

If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility (Butler:2004)

Deniz Soezen's work reminds us that in the encounter we are undone and it is in our undoing that new possibilities arise. Her work allows for the supplementarity of the visual to insert doubt and uncertainty into the reading of the pieces that in an age of renewed division through simplistic and cynical demonisation, takes on a new urgency.

© Rachel Garfield 2010

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An excerpt from a text by Dr. Rachel Garfield, ©2010

The installation combines a video piece by Suzan Dennis (Deniz Soezen’s British alter ego) with an installation of up to 140 hand-painted ceramic tiles and a tryptich consisting of photographs of Aziziye Mosque, former Apollo Cinema

Suzan Dennis: “My visit of Aziziye mosque/ Astra Cinema”

DVD-Pal; Great Britain 2009; 4 min 42; loop Voice (English and Turkish): Suzan Dennis

Suzan Dennis: Aziziye Mosque / Astra Cinema, installation, 2009

140 hand-painted ceramic tiles; 15,3 x 15,3 cm each, dimensions variable

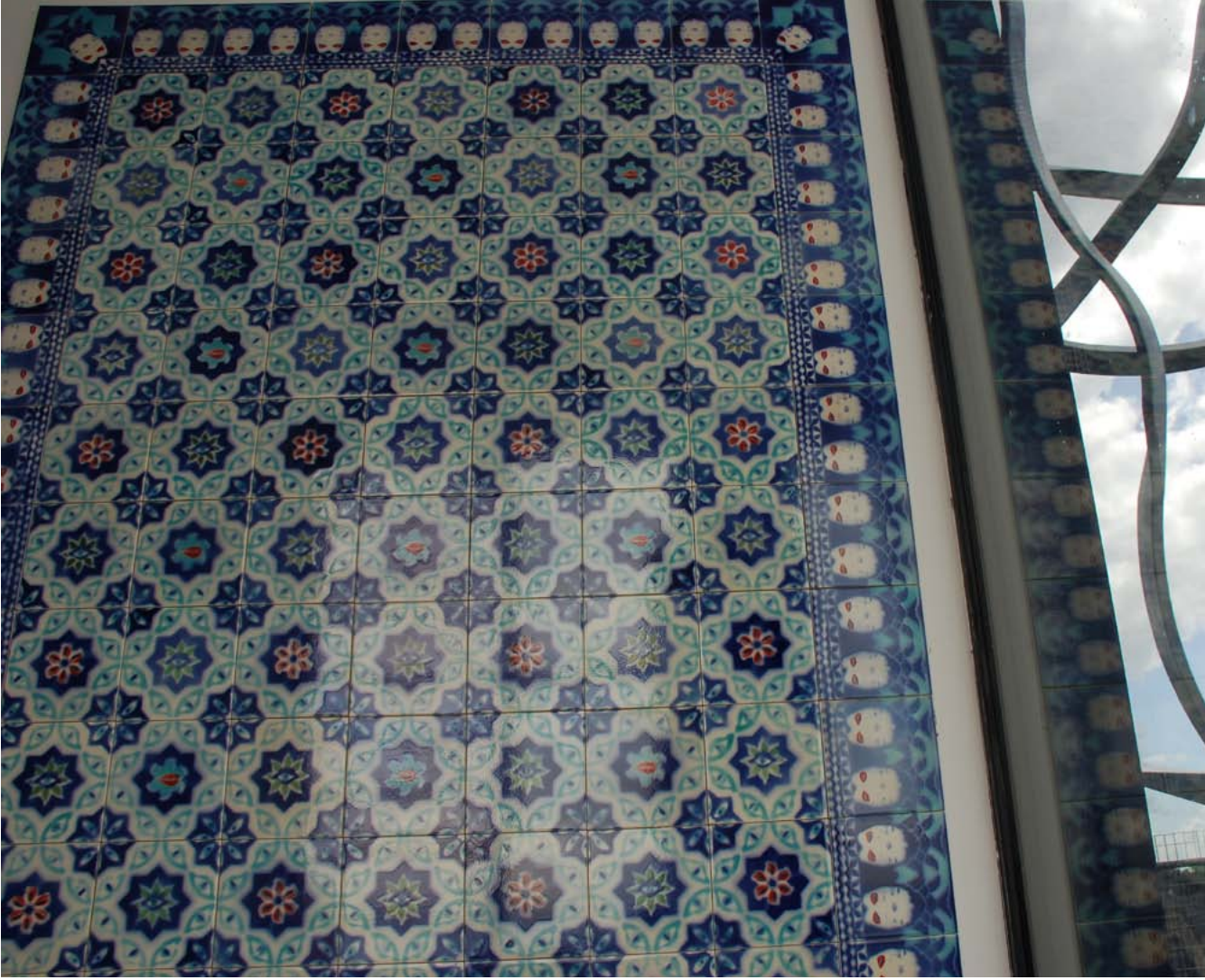
Shown at:

**–“be longing”, solo show feat. Suzan Dennis, Visual Arts Platform, ACF, London, installation shots, 2010
–MFA-degree-show, Goldsmiths College London, 2009**









Deniz Sözen

The installation consists of original childhood drawings which were made by the artist around 1987 at the time she entered primary school in Turkey. The drawings often show herself as double or triple. In the audio-piece we can listen to art therapy students and the artist's mother analyzing specific drawings with regards to her experience of migration and the question of the twin or double. This project is ongoing/ work in progress.

Deniz, Deniz & Deniz (blond, brunett, dark-haired)

Installation, 2009, feltpen-drawings, approx. 1987; audio-piece, 2009, 9 min 53







For this series of objects photographs of the artist's family album have been distorted, re-worked and transformed into collages and mini-stages. The artist's personal archive was also used for the experimental video "Odaliske auf Tuchfühlung- eine Schleierfahndung" (English title: Unveiling Odalisque) which is exploring the attributes of various cultures by comparing the headscarf- wearing-habits of the artist's two grandmothers, one of Turkish, the other of German origin and the use of the veil by other family members.

2006/07, three-dimensional cardboard objects, mixed-media (oil, acrylic, photographs, textiles, cardboard), various dimensions

Shown at:
—23 ATELIERS, open studio in the framework of Wiener Bezirksfestwochen, 2010, Vienna
—Bäckerstrasse4 gallery, 2009, Vienna







Deniz Sözen

Deniz Soezen asked Turkish weavers in the small town of Gördes to translate the design of her own childhood drawing (1987/ Turkey) into a wool carpet. The artist documented this complex process which inevitably leads to questions regarding trade, globalization and the weavers' perspectives in a short documentary-style video-piece which is shown together with the carpet.

Carpets can be seen as metaphors for migration. The title "Uçan Halım" – "My flying carpet" highlights the aspect of mobility, whilst echoing popular Orientalist clichés.

The project can be considered as a homage to Italian conceptual artist Alighiero e Boetti who used to work with artisan embroiderers in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1970ies.

The presentation of the handwoven carpet in the salon of a private home in Basel aims to enable visitors to explore the multiple connotations of this artefact and initiate further discussion about art.

The exhibition is open to the public and can be visited by appointment.

Uçan Halım/My flying carpet

2012, The installation consists of a handwoven carpet (wool carpet 135 cm x 190 cm) and a documentary – style video (HDV; approx. 14 min, loop). The piece was commissioned by Herbert Manser and Lisa Palak-Otzoup to be displayed in the „niche“ of their living room in Basel, Switzerland.

**Shown at:
–Die Nische, c/o Manser/Palak-
Otzoup, Installation shot, Basel, 2012**







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short summary of:

kabuki kebab / alternative title: 26. May 2008 Pitfield Str. (2008-2010) from the series "Home Stories/Public Diary Project"

A trilogy of absurd anecdotes connects different locations and spaces of migration through Turkish specialities: Doener Kebabs are sold in China as a German delicacy, we're told by the narrator's voice. A woman

dressed as a Geisha is performing awkwardly a Japanese ritual dance in a London Kebab shop. A British man of Japanese descent laments being mistaken for Chinese. A Senegal-born Viennese purchases a "durum" at a "Würstelstand" (Viennese sausage booth) and compares it to sushi from Senegal. Through the polyphony of voices and languages the boundaries between biographical narration, cultural location, fact and fiction are blurred in a kaleidoscopic chain of absurd scenarios.

Cast: Deniz Soezen, Tetsuro Nagata,

Niang Serigne Mor

Thanks to: Tetsuro Nagata (Voice, simultaneous translation into Japanese),

Karine Teyssier (make-up), Simon Takasaki (yukata), Catherine Borra (camera)

Home Stories – Public Diary Project
kabuki kebab/alternative title: 26. May 2008, Pitfield Str. (2008-2010)
DVD-Pal, 11 min 12

Home Stories – Public Diary Project
21. May 2008, New Cross Road
DVD-Pal, 1 min 47

voice/camera/montage/subtitles:

Deniz Soezen

Christl Mudrak is appearing doing her performance Pedro – the Cat

Thanks to: Window 135, Tim Jones & Meena Chodha, Soledad Garcia

Home Stories/Public Diary Project
31. May 2008, On the Bus
DVD-Pal, 3 min, 56 sec
performance/voice/camera/ montage :
Deniz Soezen

Shown at:

–"Living Across - Spaces of Migration", group exhibition (cat.), curated by Christian Kravagna, x:hibit, Vienna, 2010





Kilim Filim – a documentary-style video project in collaboration with Sara Hossein. Reasoning about the presence of carpets at documenta12, Sara Hossein and I conceived an alternative art mediation project which provided the base for Kilim Filim shot in summer 2007. The project ties-in with the curatorial concept for the migration of form, which envisages establishing interrelationships and formal parallels between examples of carpets from different origins and contemporary art at documenta12.

Focusing on local carpets in Kassel as the basis for aesthetic investigation, kilim filim intends to explore the cross-cultural transfer of knowledge, the re-ception of (Oriental) carpets and their meaning in different contexts.

We visited twelve participants living in Kassel – of German, Persian, Turkish and Moroccan origin and coming from different professional backgrounds – a carpet trader, a textile restorer, an imam of the local mosque, housewives and aficionados – individually, in order to film their carpets and textile-related stories.

The carpets generated a myriad of comments on history, identity, memory, the loss of traditional crafts, globalisation and cultural exchange, concepts of beauty and comfort, home and belonging.

Kilim Filim – German/Turkish/Persian with English subtitles, 2008
Duration : 13 min 38, DVD-Pal, loop

CREDITS

Art mediation project, camera & interviews:
Deniz Soezen & Sara Hossein
Script & Editing: Deniz Soezen
Sponsor: Fonds Soziokultur
Equipment: Projektmedienzentrum Offener Kanal Kassel





In Iran, Afghanistan and in Syria



Deniz Sözen

Through animated sequences, documentary footage and experimental film strategies Deniz Sözen alias the Odalisque “Kalypso El Kader” is analyzing the attributes of various cultures by comparing the headscarf-wearing-habits of her two grandmothers, one of Turkish, the other of German origin.

«For women who wear it and artists who represent it, the veil is a garment whose meaning cannot be contained. (...) If the secret imagined to lie behind the veil reveals one thing, it is that it cannot be contained within a single truth, experience or understanding. Instead the veil emerges as a form of clothing that is rooted in specific historical moments and locations, its depiction is similarly contingent and its adoption, adaptation and rejection is always itself relational.” *

*Lewis, Reina in: Bailey, David/Tawadros Gilane: Veil-Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art, Iniva, London, 2003, Preface

Unveiling Odalisque

“Odaliske auf Tuchfühlung – eine Schleierfahndung”, 2005
Englisch title: Unveiling Odalisque
Turkish title: Cariye örtü temasında

DVD-Pal, colour, stereo

Original duration: 12' , interactive version for installation

World-premiere: screening at diagonale 2006, festival of Austrian Film, Graz

Credits

Concept, performance, animation and montage: Deniz Soezen

Camera: Deniz Soezen, Katharina Olschbaur, Niki Jantsch, Brigitte Kovacs, Karine Teyssier

Music: Hakan Gürses

Sound: Deniz Soezen, Can Soezen

Starring:

Deniz Soezen, Oda Merten, Hayriye Soezen, Gülser Soezen, Ümit Hala, Leman Hanim, a.o.

Production:

University of Applied Arts Vienna, studio for experimental animation & video studio







