

The Centre Cannot Hold

Curated by Suzanne Egeran

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Near East

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“The Centre Cannot Hold” is a group show that explores the act of looking, and what we project onto what we see. Curated by Suzanne Egeran, the exhibition features painting, sculpture and video works by seven artists, including Jake and Dinos Chapman, Sarah Crowner, Izzet Ers & Bert Gilbert, Jason Martin Güneş Terkol, and Ali Emir Tapan.

The title of the show is taken from the Yeats poem "The Second Coming," and refers to the loss of a fixed centrepiece, and our impulse to make sense of a world in flux. Perception and perspective are recurring themes, as we consider the illusion of space and role of distance in an artwork. A variety of strategies challenge viewer's expectations, leading us to question the ideals we bring to artworks - and beyond.

Upon entering the space the viewer is confronted with the visceral sound of Tibetan singing bowls, often used to mark the beginning or end of a meditation practice. They form the soundtrack to “Nowhere,” a film by Ali Emir Tapan that presents the viewer with a city seemingly made of stars - an unreal city, located forever beyond the horizon.

Likewise, Jason Martin’s painting activates our senses and our imagination. With a single gesture paint is transformed into light as a horizon line appears creating further possibilities in the heavily impastoed surface.

The materiality of painting is further explored in Sarah Crowner’s tile and fabric works. In line with hard edge abstraction, Crowner’s canvases are composed of individual pieces that have been painted and sewn together by hand. Like the lines created by stitching, the grout work becomes a gesture, a line drawn in space. Both works have a sculptural quality though they are considered to be paintings.

Güneş Terkol’s embroidered fabric works hang in space, the layered images creating new forms as they interact with one another. This new series of "Unwritten Letters" is inspired by the letters Terkol has been writing to herself nightly since the Gezi protests. The format is related to traditional stationary and features her mythological creatures that are a cross between ancient symbols and imagined forms.

The surface of Hayv Kahraman’s painting incorporates references to her Iraqi heritage and the war that her family fled from when she was a child. The painting’s background pattern is created using plastic miniature soldiers dating from various wars in Iraq. The artist places the soldiers on the canvas, coats them with glue and pigment, and then removes them, creating an absence of sorts. The female figure is painted on top, subverting the power structure. She overrides these war soldiers but you can still see them in some areas of her flesh, marking her like a scar.

The horrors of war and other chilling aspects of humanity are presented in the elaborate hellscapes of Jake and Dinos Chapman. References to high and low culture combined with humor and irreverence give us a way to consider the absurdity of humanity and our actions, past and present.

The Liberation Suits by Izzet Ers & Bert Gilbert beckon the viewer with their bodily forms and seductive surfaces. Multiple layers of canvas, calico and tuile are hand-stitched and embroidered with silk thread, leather and gold leaf. The viewer is invited to read between the lines and liberate themselves from all forms of double talk. Ritual, repetition and the promise of future action are captured here.

“The Centre Cannot Hold” is hosted by Near East magazine in their Istanbul headquarters and is part of an ongoing series of art projects.